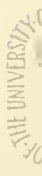
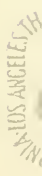
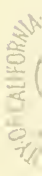
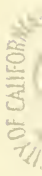
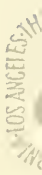


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AN ALBUM OF WOMEN

AND

OTHER POEMS.

BY

ARTHUR W. E. O'SHAUGHNESSY.

LONDON :

JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN, PICCADILLY.

1870.

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I Dedicate this Book

TO MY FRIEND,

JOHN PAYNE.

775450

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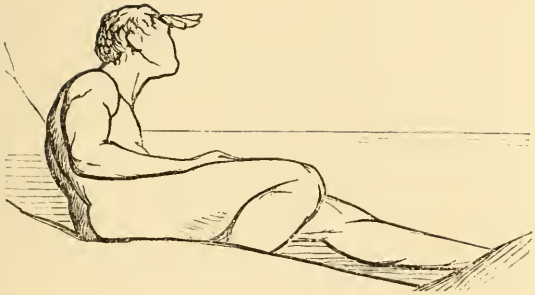
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EXILE.

Des voluptés intérieures
Le sourire mystérieux.

VICTOR HUGO.

A COMMON folk I walk among ;
I speak dull things in their own tongue :
But all the while within I hear
A song I do not sing for fear—
How sweet, how different a thing !
And when I come where none are near
I open all my heart and sing.

I am made one with these indeed,
And give them all the love they need—

Such love as they would have of me :

But in my heart—ah, let it be !—

I think of it when none is nigh—

There is a love they shall not see ;

For it I live—for it will die.

And oft-times, though I share their joys,
And seem to praise them with my voice,

Do I not celebrate my own,

Ay, down in some far inward zone

Of thoughts in which they have no part ?

Do I not feel—ah, quite alone

With all the secret of my heart ?

O when the shroud of night is spread

On these, as Death is on the dead,

So that no sight of them shall mar

The blessèd rapture of a star—

Then I draw forth those thoughts at will ;

And like the stars those bright thoughts are ;

And boundless seems the heart they fill :

For every one is as a link ;
And I enchain them as I think ;
 Till present, and remembered bliss,
 And better, worlds on after this,
I have—led on from each to each
 Athwart the limitless abyss—
In some surpassing sphere I reach.

I draw a veil across my face
Before I come back to the place
 And dull obscurity of these ;
 I hide my face, and no man sees ;
I learn to smile a lighter smile,
 And change, and look just what they please.
It is but for a little while.

I go with them ; and in their sight
I would not scorn their little light,
 Nor mock the things they hold divine ;
 But when I kneel before the shrine
Of some base deity of theirs,
 I pray all inwardly to mine,
And send my soul up with my prayers :

For I—ah, to myself I say—

I have a heaven though far away ;

And there my Love went long ago,

With all the things my heart loves so ;

And there my songs fly, every one :

And I shall find them there I know

When this sad pilgrimage is done.

A NEGLECTED HARP.

O HUSHED and shrouded room !
O silence that enchains !

O me—of many melodies
The cold and voiceless tomb ;

What sweet impassioned strains,

What fair unearthly things,

Sealed up in frozen cadences,

Are aching in my strings !

Each time the setting sun,
At eve when all is still,
Doth reach a pale faint finger in
 To touch them one by one ;
O what an inward thrill
Of music makes them swell !
The prisoned song-pulse beats within
And almost breaks the spell.

Each time the ghostly moon
Among the shadows gleams,
And leads them in a mournful dance
 To some mysterious tune ;
O then, indeed, it seems
Strange muffled tones repeat
The wail within me, and perchance
The measure of the feet.

But often when the ring
Of some sweet voice is near,
Or past me the light garments brush
 Soft as a spirit's wing,—

O, more than I can bear,
I feel, intense, the throb
Of some rich inward music gush
That comes out in a sob.

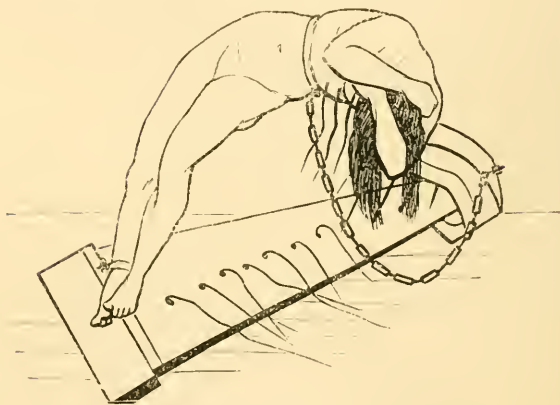
For am I not—alas,
 The quick days come and go—
A weak and songless instrument
 Through which the song-breaths pass?
I would a heart might know,
I would a hand might free
These wondrous melodies up-pent
And languishing in me.

* *

*

A sharp strange music smote
 The night.—In yon recess
The shrouded harp from all its strings
 Gave forth a piercing note :

With that long bitterness
The stricken air still aches ;
'Twas like the one true word that sings
Some poet whose heart breaks.



THREE FLOWERS OF MODERN GREECE.

I.

IANOULA.

O SISTERS ! fairly have ye to rejoice,
Who of your weakness wed
With lordly might : yea, now I praise your choice.
As the vine clingeth with fair fingers spread
Over some dark tree-stem,
So on your goodly husbands with no dread
Ye cling, and your fair fingers hold on them.

For godlike stature, and unchanging brow
Broad as the heaven above,
Yea, for fair mighty looks ye chose, I trow ;
And prided you to see, in strivings rough,
Dauntless, their strong arms raised ;
And little loth were ye to give your love
To husbands such as these whom all men praised.

But I, indeed, of many wooers, took
None such for boast or stay,
But a pale lover with a sweet sad look :
The smile he wed me with was like some ray
Shining on dust of death ;
And Death stood near him on my wedding day,
And blanched his forehead with a fatal breath.

I loved to feel his weak arm lean on mine,
Yea, and to give him rest,
Bidding his pale and languid face recline
Softly upon my shoulder or my breast,—
Thinking, alas, how sweet
To hold his spirit in my arms so press'd,
That even Death's hard omens I might cheat.

I found his drooping hand the warmest place

Here where my warm heart is ;

I said, “ Dear love, what thoughts are in thy face ?

Has Death as fair a bosom, then, as this ?”

—O sisters, do not start !

His cold lips answered with a fainting kiss,

And his hand struck its death chill to my heart.

II.

THE FAIR MAID AND THE SUN.

O SONS of men, that toil, and love with tears!

Know ye, O sons of men, the maid who dwells
Between the two seas at the Dardanelles?

Her face hath charmed away the change of years,
And all the world is fillèd with her spells.

No task is hers for ever, but the play
Of setting forth her beauty day by day :

There in your midst, O sons of men that toil,
She laughs the long eternity away.

The chains about her neck are many-pearled,
Rare gems are those round which her hair is curled ;
 She hath all flesh for captive, and for spoil,
The fruit of all the labour of the world.

She getteth up and maketh herself bare,
And letteth down the wonder of her hair
 Before the sun ; the heavy golden locks
Fall in the hollow of her shoulders fair.

She taketh from the lands, as she may please,
All jewels, and all corals from the seas ;
 She layeth them in rows upon the rocks ;
Laugheth, and bringeth fairer ones than these.

Five are the goodly necklaces that deck
The place between her bosom and her neck ;
 She passeth many a bracelet o'er her hands ;
And, seeing she is white without a fleck,

And, seeing she is fairer than the tide,
And of a beauty no man can abide—

 Proudly she standeth as a goddess stands,
And mocketh at the sun and sea for pride :

And to the sea she saith : “ O silver sea,
Fair art thou, but thou art not fair like me ;
 Open thy white-toothed dimpled mouths and try ;
They laugh not the soft way I laugh at thee.”

And to the sun she saith : “ O golden sun,
Fierce is thy burning till the day is done ;
 But thou shalt burn mere grass and leaves, while I
Shall burn the hearts of men up everyone.”

O fair and dreadful is the maid who dwells
Between the two seas at the Dardanelles :
 As fair and dread as in the ancient years ;
And still the world is fillèd with her spells,

O sons of men, that toil, and love with tears !

III.

THE CYPRESS.

O IVORY bird, that shakest thy wan plumes,
And dost forget the sweetness of thy throat
For a most strange and melancholy note—
That wilt forsake the summer and the blooms
And go to winter in a place remote !

The country where thou goest, Ivory bird !
It hath no pleasant nesting-place for thee ;
There are no skies nor flowers fair to see,
Nor any shade at noon—as I have heard—
But the black shadow of the Cypress tree.

The Cypress tree, it groweth on a mound ;
And sickly are the flowers it hath of May,
Full of a false and subtle spell are they ;
For whoso breathes the scent of them around,
He shall not see the happy Summer day.

In June, it bringeth forth, O Ivory bird !
A winter berry, bitter as the sea ;
And whoso eateth of it, woe is he—
He shall fall pale, and sleep—as I have heard—
Long in the shadow of the Cypress tree.

A PRECIOUS URN.

THE great effulgence of the early days
Of one first summer, whose bright joys, it seems,
Have been to all my songs their golden themes ;
The rose leaves gathered from the faded ways
I wandered in when they were all a-blaze
With living flowers and flame of the sunbeams ;
And, more than all, that ending of my dreams
Divinely, in a dream-like thing,—the face
Of one belovèd lady once possest
In one long kiss that made my whole life burn :
What of all these remains to me ?—At best,
A heap of fragrant ashes now, that turn
My heavy heart into a funeral urn
Which I have buried deep within my breast.

SERAPHITUS.

A LAS ! that we should not have known,
For all his strange ethereal calm,
And thoughts so little like our own
And presence like a shed-forth balm,
He was some Spirit from a zone
Of light, and ecstasy, and psalm,
Radiant and near about God's throne :
Now he hath flown !

The heaven did cleave on him away ;
And for what thing he chose to dwell
In a mere tenement of clay
With mortal seeming—who can tell ?

But there in some unearthly way
He wrought, and, with an inner spell,
Miraculously did array
That house of clay.

The very walls were in some sort
Made beautiful, with many a fresque
Or carven filigree of Thought,
Now seen a clear and statuesque
Accomplishment of dreams—now sought
Through many a lovely arabesque
And metaphor, that seemed to sport
With what it taught.

Most bright and marvellously fair
Those things did seem to all mankind ;
And some indeed, with no cold stare
Beholding them, could lift their mind
Through sweet transfigurement to share
Their inward light : the rest were blind,
And wondered much, yet had small care
Whence such things were.

And, day by day, he did invent
—As though nought golden were enough,
In manner of an ornament—
Some high chivalrous deed, above
All price, whereof the element
Was the most stainless ore of Love ;
A boundless store of it he spent
With lavishment.

And when therewith that house became
All in a strange sort glorified ;
For through whole beauty, as of flame,
Those things, resplendent far and wide,
Did draw unto them great acclaim ;
Lo, many a man there was who tried
With base alloys to do the same,
And gat men's shame.

But all about that house he set
A wondrous flowering thing—his speech,
That without ceasing did beget
Such fair unearthly blossoms, each

Seemed from some paradise, and wet
As with an angel's tears, and each
Gave forth some long perfume to let
No man forget.

A new delicious music erred
For ever through the devious ways
Tangled with blooming of each word ;
As though in that enchanted maze
Some sweet and most celestial bird
Were caught, and, hid from every gaze,
Did there pour forth such song as stirred
All men who heard.

Before him was perpetual birth
Of flowers whereof, aye, more and more,
The world begetteth a sad dearth ;
And those rare balms man searcheth for,
Fair ecstasy, and the soul's mirth :
Half grudgingly the angels bore
That one should waste on a lost earth
Things of such worth.

It may be, with a strange delight,
After an age of gazing through
That mirror of things infinite
That well nigh burns the veil of blue
Drawn down between it and our sight—
It may be, with a joy all new,
He sought the darkness and the light
Of day and night.

It may be, that, upon some wave
Which through the incense-laden skies
Scarce forced its ripple, there once clave
A thin earth-fragrance—in such wise
It smote his sense and made him crave
For that strange sweet : maybe, likewise,
The leaves their subtle perfume gave
Up from some grave :

And pleasant did it seem to heap
About the heart dim spells that lull
Profoundly between death and sleep,
To feel mid earthly soothings, dull

And sweet, upon the whole sense creep
The dream—life-long and wonderful,
That hath all souls of men to keep
Lest they should weep.

But often, when there seemed to fall
Bright shadows of half-blindness, thin,
And like fine films wrought over all
The flashing sights of Heaven within ;
While that fair perishable wall
Of flesh so barred and shut him in
That scarce a silver spirit-call
Reached him at all—

O then the Earth failed not to bring,
Indeed through many a day and eve—
The strength of all her flowering
About him ; nor forgot to weave,
With soft perpetual murmuring,
Her spells, that such a sweet way grieve,
And hold the heart to each fair thing,
Yea, with a sting :

And, sometimes, with strange prevalence
 He felt those dim enchantments float
Most soothingly upon his sense ;
 While faint in memory remote,
Brought down the heart knew not from whence,
 The thought of heaven within him smote—
And many a yearning did commence
 Vague and intense—

Fair part of that unknown disease
 Of dull material love, whereby
The luring flower-semblances
 Of earthliness and death would try
To bind his heart beyond release
 To each fair mortal sympathy,
That Death at length might wholly seize
 Him with all these.

And, surely, on some shining bed
 Of flowers in full summer's gleam ;
Or when the autumn time had shed
 Its wealth of perfume and its dream

On some rich eve—no thing of dread
To all his spirit did it seem,
To dream on, feeling sweet earth spread
Over his head.

. * *

*

But, one long twilight—hushed and dim—
The blue unfathomable clime
Of heaven seemed wholly to o'erbrim
With presence of the Lord—sublime ;
And voices of the Seraphim
Fell through the ether like a chime :
He rose : his past way seemed to him
Like a child's whim.

THE LOVER.

I WAS not with the rest at play ;
My brothers laughed in joyous mood :
But I—I wandered far away
Into the fair and silent wood ;
And with the trees and flowers I stood,
As dumb and full of dreams as they :
—For One it seemed my whole heart knew,
Or One my heart had known long since,
Was peeping at me through the dew ;
And with bright laughter seemed to woo
My beauty, like a Fairy prince.

Oh, what a soft enchantment filled
The lonely paths and places dim !
It was as though the whole wood thrilled,
And a dumb joy, because of him,
Weighed down the lilies tall and slim,
And made the roses blush, and stilled
The great wild voices in half fear :
It was as though his smile did hold
All things in trances manifold ;
And in each place as he drew near
The leaves were touched and turned to gold.

And well I seemed to know, the while,
It was for me and for my sake,
He wrought that magic with his smile,
And set the unseen spells to make
The lonely ways I loved to take
So full of sweetness, to beguile
My heart and keep me there for hours ;
And sometimes I was sure he lay
Beside me hid among the flowers,
Or climbed above me, and in play
Shook down the white tree-bloom in showers.

But more and more he seemed to seek
My heart : till, dreaming of all this,
I thought one day to hear him speak,
Or feel, indeed, his sudden kiss
Bind me to some great unknown bliss :
Then there would stay upon my cheek
Full many a light and honied stain,
That told indeed how I had lain
Deep in the flowery banks all day ;
And round me too there would remain
Some strange wood-blossom's scent away.

'Twas not the bright and fond deceit
Of that first summer,—whose great bloom
Quite overcame me with its sweet,
And seemed to fill me and consume
My very brain with its perfume ;—
'Twas no false spell made my heart beat
With such a joy to be alone
With all the bloom and all the scent :
It was a thing I dared not own,
Already whispered there and known,
Already with my whole life blent.

It was this secret, vast, sublime,
Too full of wonder to be told—
Whose extreme rapture from that time
Doth ever more and more enfold
My spirit, like a robe of gold,
Or, as it were, the magic clime
Of some fair heaven about me shed—
Wherein are songs of unseen birds,
And whispers of delicious words
More sweet than any man hath said
Of all the living or the dead.

—O, the incomparable love
Of him, my Lover !—O, to tell
Its way and measure were above
The throbbing chords of speech that swell
Within me !—Doth it not excel
All other, sung or written of?
Yea now, O all ye fair mankind—
Consider well the gracious line
Of those your lovers ; call to mind
Their love of you, and ye shall find
Not one among them all like mine.

It seems as though, from calm to calm,
A whole fair age had passed me by,
Since first this Lover, through a charm
Of flowers, wooed so tenderly,
I had no fear of drawing nigh,
Nor knew, indeed, that—with an arm
Closed round and holding me—he led
My eager way from sight to sight
Of all the summer magic—right
To where himself had surely spread
Some pleasant snare for my delight.

And now, in an eternal sphere,
Beneath one flooding look of his—
Wherein, all beautiful and dear,
That endless melting gold that is
His love, with flawless memories
Grows ever richer and more clear—
My life seems held, as some faint star
Beneath its sun : and through the far
Celestial distances for miles,
To where vast mirage futures are,
I trace the gilding of his smiles.

And, in the long enthralling dream,
That, ever—through each purer zone
Of love translating me—doth seem
To bring my spirit near his own,
I hear the veiled angelic tone
Of many voices ; as I deem,
Assuring me of something sweet,
And strange, and wondrous, and intense ;
Which thing they evermore repeat
In fair half parables, from whence
I draw a vague all-blissful sense.

For, one by one, e'en as I rise,
And feel the pure Ethereal
Refining all before my eyes :
Whole beauteous worlds material
Are seen to enter gradual
The great transparent paradise
Of this my dream ; and, all revealed,
To break upon me more and more
Their inward singing souls, and yield
A wondrous secret half concealed
In all their loveliness before.

And so, when, through unmeasured days,
The far effulgence of the sea
Is holding me in long amaze,
And stealing with strange ecstasy
My heart all opened silently ;—
There reach me, from among the sprays,
Ineffable faint words that sing
Within me,—how, for me alone,
One who is lover—who is King,
Hath dropt, as 'twere a precious stone,
That sea—a symbol of his throne.

And now, indeed, some precious time
It hath,—all inexpressible !
All rapture !—yea, through many a rhyme
Of wordless speech made fairly well,
And beauteous worlds' whole visible
Unbosomings of love sublime—
It hath some blessèd while become
Familiar, how all things take part
For him to whose love I am come,
And in their ways—not weak nor dumb—
Are ever calling on my heart.

And, through the long charmed solitude
Of throbbing moments, whose strong link
Is one delicious hope pursued
From trance to trance, the while I think
And know myself upon the brink
Of His eternal kiss,—endued
With part of him, the very wind
Hath power to ravish me in sips
Or long mad wooings that unbind
My hair,—wherein I truly find
The magic of his unseen lips.

And, so almighty is the thrill
I feel at many a faintest breath
Or stir of sound—as 'twere a rill
Of joy traversing me, or death
Dissolving all that hindereth
My thought from power to fulfil
Some new embodiment of bliss,—
I do consume with the immense
Delight as of some secret kiss,
And am become like one whose sense
Is used with raptures too intense !

O like some soft insidious breath,
Whose first invasion winneth quite
To all its madness or its death
The heart, resisting not the might
And poison of its new delight,—
E'en so is this that entereth
In whispers, or through subtly wrought
Enchantment snaring every thought ;
Yea, by the whole mysterious pore
Of life,—this joy surpassing aught
That heart of man hath known before.

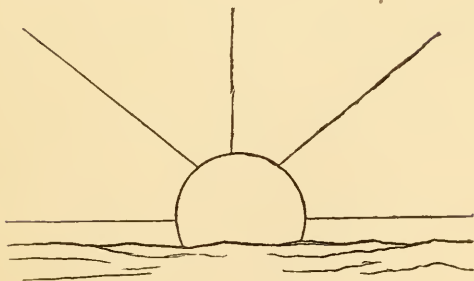
And, though, indeed, a hapless end
Of damning ruin were but sure,
Yet could I none of me defend
From such a sweet and perfect lure ;
But must, as long as they endure,
To all these sorceries still lend
My heart ; believing how I stand
Nigh some unearthly bliss that lies
Dissembled all before my eyes ;—
Do I not see a radiant Hand
Transmuting earth, and air, and skies ?

—And is not the great language mute
The stars' deep looks are wont to melt
Upon my soul, the very suit
Of this unearthly wooer—felt
So clearly pleading—I have knelt
Full oft, most dreading to pollute
The holy rapture with a sigh?
And doth not every accent nigh
Consume each Past to a thin shred;
While endless visions glorify
My sight, and haloes touch my head?
Yea, mystic consummation! yea,
O Wondrous suitor,—whosoe'er
Thou art; that in such mighty way,
In distant realms, athwart the air
And lands and seas, with all things fair,
Hast wooed me even till this day;—
It seems thou drawest near to me;
Or I, indeed, so nigh to thee,
I catch rare breaths of a delight
From thy most glorious ccuntry, see
Its distant glow upon some height.

At times there is vouchsafed me, e'en
Some sign that certainly foretells
Of thee at hand : so I have seen—
Caught by no earthly clash of bells—
A gleam of silver citadels ;
Distant, and radiant with such sheen
As only on high virgin snows,
Or from the diamond one knows ;
Displayed a moment, without shroud,
Eclipsing all the night's fair shows
From some dim pinnacle of cloud :

Or, through a calm hushed interval
Of most charmed thinking, there hath passed,
And with no rumour or footfall,
A troop of blonde ones who surpassed
All tales of loveliness amassed
In my child's dreamland ; costumed all
As for a bridal ; who did shine
With such a splendour on each face,
And light upon the garments fine,
I knew them surely of a race
That dwells in that fair realm of thine.

O thou my Destiny ! O thou
My own—my very Love—my Lord !
Whom from the first day until now
My heart, divining, hath adored
So perfectly it hath abhorred
The tie of each frail human vow—
O I would whisper in thine ear—
Yea, may I not, once, in the clear
Pure night, when, only, silver shod
The angels walk ?—thy name, I fear
And love, and tremble saying—GOD !



A WHISPER FROM THE GRAVE.

MY Life points with a radiant hand,
 Along a golden ray of sun
That lights some distant promised land,
 A fair way for my feet to run :
My Death stands heavily in gloom,
And digs a soft bed in the tomb
 Where I may sleep when all is done.

The flowers take hold upon my feet ;
 Fair fingers beckon me along ;
I find Life's promises so sweet
 Each thought within me turns to song :
But Death stands digging for me—lest
Some day I need a little rest,
 And come to think the way too long.

O seems there not beneath each rose

A face ?—the blush comes burning through ;
And eyes my heart already knows

Are filling themselves from the blue,
Above the world ; and One, whose hair
Holds all my sun, is coming, fair,

And must bring heaven if all be true :

And now I have face, hair, and eyes ;

And lo, the Woman that these make
Is more than flower, and sun, and skies !

Her slender fingers seem to take
My whole fair life, as 'twere a bowl,
Wherein she pours me forth her soul,
And bids me drink it for her sake.

Methinks the world becomes an isle ;

And there—immortal, as it seems—
I gaze upon her face, whose smile

Flows round the world in golden streams :
Ah, Death is digging for me deep,
Lest some day I should need to sleep
And solace me with other dreams !

But now I feel as though a kiss
Of hers should ever give me birth
In some new heaven of life-long bliss ;
And heedlessly, athwart my mirth,
I see Death digging day by day
A grave ; and, very far away,
I hear the falling of the earth.

Ho there, if thou wilt wait for me
Thou Death !—I say—keep in thy shade ;
Crouch down behind the willow tree,
Lest thou shouldst make my love afraid ;
If thou hast aught with me, pale friend,
Some flitting leaf its sigh shall lend
To tell me when the grave is made !

And lo, e'en while I now rejoice,
Encircled by my love's fair arm,
There cometh up to me a voice,
Yea, through the fragrance and the charm ;
Quite like some sigh the forest heaves
Quite soft—a murmur of dead leaves,
And not a voice that bodeeth harm :

O lover, fear not—have thou joy ;

For life and love are in thy hands :

I seek in no wise to destroy

The peace thou hast, nor make the sands

Run quicker through thy pleasant span ;

Blest art thou above many a man,

And fair is She who with thee stands :

I only keep for thee out here—

O far away, as thou hast said,

Among the willow trees—a clear

Soft space for slumber, and a bed ;

That after all, if life be vain,

And love turn at the last to pain,

Thou mayst have ease when thou art dead.

O grieve not : back to thy love's lips

Let her embrace thee more and more,

Consume that sweet of hers in sips :

I only wait till it is o'er ;

For fear thou'lt weary of her kiss,

And come to need a bed like this

Where none shall kiss thee evermore.

Believe each pleasant muttered vow

She makes to thee, and see with ease

Each promised heaven before thee now ;

I only think, if one of these

Should fail thee—O thou wouldst need then

To come away right far from men,

And weep beneath the willow trees.

And, therefore, have I made this place,

Where thou shouldst come on that hard day,

Full of a sad and weary grace ;

For here the drear wind hath its way

With grass, and flowers, and withered tree—

As sorrow shall that day with thee,

If it should happen as I say.

And, therefore, have I kept the ground,

As 'twere quite holy, year by year ;

The great wind lowers to a sound

Of sighing as it passes near ;

And seldom doth a man intrude

Upon the hallowed solitude,

And never but to shed a tear.

So, if it be thou come, alas,

For sake of sorrow long and deep,

I—Death, the flowers, and leaves, and grass—

Thy grief-fellows, do mourn and weep :

Or if thou come, with life's whole need

To rest a life-long space indeed,

I too and they do guard thy sleep.

Moreover, sometimes, while all we

Have kept the grave with heaviness,

The weary place hath seemed to be

Not barren of all blessedness :

Spent sunbeams rest them here at noon,

And grieving spirits from the moon

Walk here at night in shining dress.

And there is gazing down on all

Some great and love-like eye of blue,

Wherefrom, at times, there seem to fall

Strange looks that soothe the place quite through ;

As though indeed, if all love's sweet

And all life's good should prove a cheat,

They knew some heaven that might be true.

—It is a tender voice like this

That comes to me in accents fair :

Well ; and through much of love and bliss,

It seemeth not a thing quite bare

Of comfort, e'en to be possest

Of that one spot of earth for rest,

Among the willow trees down there.



BISCLAVARET.

Bisclaveret ad nun en Bretan,
Garwall l'apelent li Norman.
Jadis le poët-hum oïr,
E souvent suleit avenir,
Humes plusurs Garwall devindrent
E es boscages meisun tindrent.

MARIE DE FRANCE : *Lais.*

*In either mood, to bless or curse,
God bringeth forth the breath of man ;
No angel sire, no woman nurse
Shall change the work that God began :*

*One spirit shall be like a star,
He shall delight to honour one ;
Another spirit he shall mar ;
None shall undo what God hath done.*

The weaker holier season wanes ;
Night comes with darkness and with sins ;
And, in all forests, hills, and plains,
A keener, fiercer life begins.

And, sitting by the low hearth fires,
I start and shiver fearfully ;
For thoughts all strange and new desires
Of distant things take hold on me ;

And many a feint of touch or sound
Assails me, and my senses leap
As in pursuit of false things found
And lost in some dim path of sleep.

But, momentarily, there seems restored
A triple strength of life and pain ;
I thrill, as though a wine were poured
Upon the pore of every vein :

I burn—as though keen wine were shed
On all the sunken flames of sense—
Yea, till the red flame grows more red,
And all the burning more intense,

And, sloughing weaker lives grown wan
With needs of sleep and weariness,
I quit the hallowed haunts of man
And seek the mighty wilderness.

—Now over intervening waste
Of lowland drear, and barren wold,
I scour, and ne'er assuage my haste,
Inflamed with yearnings manifold ;

Drinking a distant sound that seems
To come around me like a flood ;
While all the track of moonlight gleams
Before me like a streak of blood ;

And bitter stifling scents are past
A-dying on the night behind,
And sudden piercing stings are cast
Against me in the tainted wind.

And lo, afar, the gradual stir,
And rising of the stray wild leaves ;
The swaying pine, and shivering fir,
And windy sound that moans and heaves

In first fits, till with utter throcs
The whole wild forest lolls about :
And all the fiercer clamour grows,
And all the moan becomes a shout ;
And mountains near and mountains far
Breathe freely : and the mingled roar
Is as of floods beneath some star
Of storms, when shore cries unto shore.

But soon, from every hidden lair
Beyond the forest tracts, in thick
Wild coverts, or in deserts bare,
Behold They come—renewed and quick—

The splendid fearful herds that stray
By midnight, when tempestuous moons
Light them to many a shadowy prey,
And earth beneath the thunder swoons.

—O who at any time hath seen
Sight all so fearful and so fair,
Unstricken at his heart with keen
Whole envy in that hour to share

Their unknown curse and all the strength
Of the wild thirsts and lusts they know,
The sharp joys sating them at length,
The new and greater lusts that grow ?

But who of mortals shall rehearse
How fair and dreadfully they stand,
Each marked with an eternal curse,
Alien from every kin and land ?

—Along the bright and blasted heights
Loudly their cloven footsteps ring !
Full on their fronts the lightning smites,
And falls like some dazed baffled thing.

Now through the mountain clouds they break,
With many a crest high-antlered, reared
Athwart the storm : now they outshake
Fierce locks or manes, glossy and weird,

That sweep with sharp perpetual sound
The arid heights where the snows drift,
And drag the slain pines to the ground,
And all into the whirlwind lift

The heavy sinking slopes of shade
From hidden hills of monstrous girth,
Till new unearthly lights have flayed
The draping darkness from the earth.

Henceforth what hiding-place shall hide
All hallowed spirits that in form
Of mortal stand beneath the wide
And wandering pale eye of the storm ?

The beadsman in his lonely cell
Hath cast one boding timorous look
Toward the heights ; then loud and well,
—Kneeling before the open book—

All night he prayeth in one breath,
Nor spareth now his sins to own :
And through his prayer he shuddereth
To hear how loud the forests groan.

For all abroad the lightnings reign,
And rally, with their lurid spell,
The multitudinous campaign
Of hosts not yet made fast in hell :

And us indeed no common arm,
Nor magic of the dark may smite,
But, through all elements of harm,
Across the strange fields of the night—

Enrolled with the whole giant host
Of shadowy, cloud-outstripping things
Whose vengeful spells are uppermost,
And convoyed by unmeasured wings,

We foil the thin dust of fatigue
With bright-shod phantom feet that dare
All pathless places and the league
Of the light shifting soils of air ;

And loud, mid fearful echoings,
Our throats, aroused with hell's own thirst,
Outbay the eternal trumpeting ;
The while, all impious and accurst,

Revealed and perfected at length
In whole and dire transfiguration,
With miracle of growing strength
We win upon a keen warm scent.

Before us each cloud fastness breaks ;
And o'er slant inward wastes of light,
And past the moving mirage lakes,
And on within the Lord's own sight—

We hunt the chosen of the Lord ;
And cease not, in wild course elate,
Until we see the flaming sword
And Gabriel before His gate !

O many a fair and noble prey
Falls bitterly beneath our chase ;
And no man till the judgment day,
Hath power to give these burial place ;

But down in many a stricken home
About the world, for these they mourn ;
And seek them yet through Christendom
In all the lands where they were born.

And oft, when Hell's dread prevalence
Is past, and once more to the earth
In chains of narrowed human sense
We turn,—around our place of birth,

We hear the new and piercing wail ;
 And, through the haunted day's long glare,
In fearful lassitudes turn pale
 With thought of all the curse we bear.

But, for long seasons of the moon,
 When the whole giant earth, stretched low,
Seems straightening in a silent swoon
 Beneath the close grip of the snow,

We well nigh cheat the hideous spells
 That force our souls resistless back,
With languorous torments worse than hell's
 To the frail body's fleshly rack :

And with our brotherhood the storms,
 Whose mighty revelry unchains
The avalanches, and deforms
 The ancient mountains and the plains,—

We hold high orgies of the things,
 Strange and accursèd of all flesh,
Whereto the quick sense ever brings
 The sharp forbidden thrill afresh.

And far away, among our kin,
 Already they account our place
With all the slain ones, and begin
 The Masses for our soul's full grace.

THOUGHT.

THERE is no place at all by night or day,
Where I—who am of that hard tyrant Thought
The slave—can find security in aught,
But He, almighty, reaching me, doth lay
His hand upon me there, so rough a way
Assaulting me,—however I am caught,
Walking or standing still—that for support
I sometimes lean on anything I may :
Then when he hath me, ease is none from him
Till he do out his strength with me ; cold sweat
Comes o'er my body and on every limb ;
My arm falls weak as from a fierce embrace ;
And, ere he leaveth me, he will have set
A great eternal mark upon my face.

THE STORY OF THE KING.

THIS is the story of the King :
Was he not great in everything ?

He built him dwelling-places three :
In one of them his Youth should be ;
To make it fair for many a feast
He conquered the whole East ;
He brought delight from every land,
And gold from many a river's strand,
And all things precious he could find
In Perse, or utmost Ind.

There, brazen guarded were the doors ;
And o'er the many painted floors
 The captive women came and went ;
 Or, with bright ornament,
Sat in the pillared places gay,
And feasted with him every day,
 And fed him with their rosy kiss :
 O there he had all bliss !

Then afterward, when he did hear
There was none like him anywhere,
 He would behold the sight so sweet
 Of all men at his feet :
And, since he heard that certainly
Not like a man was he to die,
 For all his lust that palace vast
 It seemed too small at last.

Therefore, another house he made,
So wide that it might hold arrayed
 The thousands peers of his domain
 And last his godlike reign ;

And here he was a goodly span,
While before him came every man
 To kneel and worship in his sight :
 O there he had all might !

And yet, most surely, it befel
He tired of this house as well :
 Was it too mighty after all ?
 Or still perhaps too small ?
Strangely in all men's wonderment,
He left it for a tenement
 He had all builded in one year :
 Now he is dwelling there.

He took full little of his gold ;
And of his pleasures manifold
 He had but a small heed, they say,
 That day he went away :
—O, the new dwelling he hath found
Is but a man's grave in the ground,
 And taketh up but one man's space
 In the burial place.

And now, indeed, that he is dead,
The nations have they no more dread ?

Lo, is not this the King they swore
To worship evermore ?

Will no one Love of his come near
And kiss him where he lieth there,
And warm his freezing lips again ?
—Is this then all his reign ?

He must have longed ere this to rise
And be again in all men's eyes ;
For the place where he dwelleth now
Lonely it is I trow :

But, just to stand in his own hall
And feel the warmth there once for all—
O would he not give crowns of gold ?
For the place is so cold !

But over him a tomb doth stand,
The costliest in all the land ;
And of the glory that he bore
It telleth evermore.—

So these three dwellings he hath had,
And mighty he hath been and glad,
O hath he not been sad as well?
Perhaps—but who can tell?

This is the story of the King:
Was he not great in everything?

PALM FLOWERS.

IN a land of the sun's blessing,
Where the passion-flower grows,
My heart keeps all worth possessing ;
And the way there no man knows.

—Unknown wonder of new beauty !
There my Love lives all for me ;
To love me is her whole duty,
Just as I would have it be.

All the perfumes and perfections
Of that clime have met with grace
In her body, and complexions
Of its flowers are on her face.

All soft tints of flowers most vernal,
Tints that make each other fade :
In her eyes they are eternal,
Set in some mysterious shade.

Full of dreams are the abysses
Of the night beneath her hair ;
But an open dawn of kisses
Is her mouth : O she is fair.

And she has so sweet a fashion
With her languid loving eyes,
That she stirs my soul with passion,
And renews my breath with sighs.

Now she twines her hair in tresses
With some long red lustrous vine ;
Now she weaves strange glossy dresses
From the leafy fabrics fine :

And upon her neck there mingle
Corals and quaint serpent charms,
And bright beaded sea-shells jingle
Set in circlets round her arms.

There—in solitudes sweet smelling,
Where the mighty Banyan stands,
I and she have found a dwelling
Shadowed by its giant hands :

All around our banyan bowers
Shine the reddening palm-tree ranks,
And the wild rare forest flowers
Crowded on high purple banks.

Through the long enchanted weather
—Ere the swollen fruits yet fall,
While red love-birds sit together
In thick green, and voices call

From the hidden forest places,
And are answered with strange shout
By the folk whose myriad faces
All day long are peeping out

From shy loopholes all above us
In the leafy hollows green,
—While all creatures seem to love us,
And the lofty boughs are seen

Gilded and for ever haunted
By the far ethereal smiles—
'Through the long bright time enchanted,
In those solitudes for miles,

I and She—at heart possessing
Rhapsodies of tender thought—
Wander, till our thoughts too pressing
Into new sweet words are wrought.

And at length, with full hearts sinking
Back to silence and the maze
Of immeasurable thinking,
In those inward forest ways,

We recline on mossy couches,
Vanquished by mysterious calms,
All beneath the soothing touches
Of the feather-leaved fan-palms.

Strangely, with a mighty hushing,
Falls the sudden hour of noon ;
When the flowers droop with blushing,
And a deep miraculous swoon

Seems subduing the whole forest ;
Or some distant joyous rite
Draws away each bright-hued chorist :
Then we yield with long delight

Each to each, our souls deep thirsting ;
And no sound at all is nigh,
Save from time to time the bursting
Of some fire-fed fruit on high.

Then with sudden overshadowing
Of impenetrable wings,
Comes the darkness and the crowding
Mysteries of the unseen things.

O how happy are we lovers
In weak wanderings hand in hand !—
Whom the immense palm forest covers
In that strange enchanted land ;

Whom its thousand sights stupendous
Hold in breathless charmed suspense ;
Whom its hidden sounds tremendous
And its throbbing hues intense

And the mystery of each glaring
Flower o'erwhelm with wonder dim ;—
We, who see all things preparing
Some Great Spirit's world for him !

Under pomps and splendid glamour
Of the night skies limitless ;
Through the weird and growing clamour
Of the swaying wilderness ;

Through each shock of sound that shivers
The serene palms to their height,
By white rolling tongues of rivers
Launched with foam athwart the night ;

Lost and safe amid such wonders,
We prolong our human bliss ;
Drown the terrors of the thunders
In the rapture of our kiss.

By some moon-haunted savanna,
In thick scented mid-air bowers
Draped about with some liana,
O what passionate nights are ours !

O'er our heads the squadron dances
Of the fire-fly wheel and poise ;
And dim phantoms charm our trances,
And link'd dreams prolong our joys—

Till around us creeps the early
Sweet discordance of the dawn,
And the moonlight pales, and pearly
Haloes settle round the morn ;

And from remnants of the hoary
Mists, where now the sunshine glows,
Starts at length in crimson glory
Some bright flock of flamingoes.

O that land where the suns linger
And the passion-flowers grow
Is the land for me the Singer :
There I made me, years ago,
Many a golden habitation,
Full of things most fair to see ;
And the fond imagination
Of my heart dwells there with me.

Now, farewell, all shameful sorrow !
Farewell, troublous world of men !
I shall meet you on some morrow,
But forget you quite till then.

AN EPIC OF WOMEN.

I.

CREATION.

Nam non in hac ærumnosa miseriarum valle, in qua ad laborem ceteri mortales nascimur, producta est.

BOCCACCIO : DE CLARIS MULIERIBUS.

AND God said, "Let us make a thing most fair,—

A Woman with gold hair, and eyes all blue :"

He took from the sun gold and made her hair,

And for her eyes He took His heaven's own hue.

He sought in every precious place and store,
And gathered all sweet essences that are
In all the bodies : so He made one more
Her body, the most beautiful by far.

Pure coral with pure pearl engendering,
Bore Her the fairest flower of the sea ;
And for the wonder of that new-made thing
God ceased then, and nothing more made He.

So the beginning of her was this way :
Full of sea savours, beautiful and good,
Made of sun, sky, and sea,—more fair than they—
On the green margin of the sea she stood.

The coral colour lasted in her veins,
Made her lips rosy like a sea-shell's rims ;
The purple stained her cheeks with splendid stains,
And the pearl's colour clung upon her limbs.

She took her golden hair between her hands ;
The faded gold and amber of the seas
Dropped from it in a shower upon the sands ;
The crispéd hair enwrapped her like a fleece :

And through the threads of it the sun lost gold,
And fell all pale upon her throat and breast
With play of lights and tracings manifold :
But the whole heaven shone full upon the rest.

Her curv'd shapes of shoulder and of limb,
Wrought fairly round or dwindling delicate,
Were carven in some substance made to dim
With whiteness all things carven or create.

And every sort of fairness that was yet
In work of man or God was perfected
Upon that work her bosom, where were set
In snows two wondrous jewelries of red.

The sun and sea made haloes of a light
Most soft and glimmering, and wreathed her close
Round all her wondrous shapes, and kept her bright
In a fair mystery of pearl and rose.

The waves fell fawning all about her there
Down to her ancles ; then, with kissing sweet,
Slackened and waned away in love and fear
From the bright presence of her new-formed feet.

The green-gray mists were gathering away
In distant hollows underneath the sun
Behind the round sea ; and upon that day
The work of all the world-making was done.

The world beheld, and hailed her, form and face ;
The ocean spray, the sunlight, the pure blue
Of heaven beheld and wondered at her grace ;
And God looked out of heaven and wondered too.

And ere a man could see her with desire,
Himself looked on her so, and loved her first,
And came upon her in a mist, like fire,
And of her beauty quenched his god-like thirst.

He touched her wholly with his naked soul,
At once sufficing all the new-made sense
For ever : so the Giver Himself stole
The gift, and left indeed no recompense.

All lavishly at first He did entreat
His leman ; yea, the world of things create
He rolled like any jewel at her feet,
And of her changeful whim He made a fate.

He feasted her with ease and idle food
Of gods, and taught her lusts to fill the whole
Of life ; withal He gave her nothing good,
And left her as He made her—without soul.

And lo, when he had held her for a season
In His own pleasure-palaces above,
He gave her unto man ; this is the reason
She is so fair to see, so false to love.

II.

THE WIFE OF HEPHÆSTUS.

HE was not fair to look on as a god—
Her husband whom God gave her ; for his
face,
Not as the golden face of Phœbus glowed ;
Nor in his body was there light or grace :
But he was rugged-seeming ; all his brows
Were changed and smeared with the great human
toil ;
His limbs all gnarled and knotted as the boughs
And limbs of mighty oaks are : many a soil

Was on his skin, coarse-coloured as a bark ;
Yea, he was shorn of beauty from the birth ;
But strong, and of a mighty soul to work
With Fate and all the iron of the earth.

Thereto he had a heart even to love
That woman whom God gave him ; and his part
Of fate had been quite blest—ay, sweet enough,
Having her beautiful and whole of heart.

But when he knew she was quite false and vain,
He slew her not because she was so fair ;
Yea, spite of all the rest, had rather slain
Himself, than lost the looking on her hair.

For then the labouring days had seemed to last
Longer than ever : all had been too sore,
Not to be borne as erst,—the world so vast—
Vaster than ever it had seemed before !

But, when he knew it, heavily the ire—
Darkly the sorrow of it wrought on him ;
The hollows of his eyes were filled with fire ;
The fruitless sweat was dried upon each limb :

Raging he went, and full of lust to kill :

O he was fillèd with a great despair ;

But added labour unto labour still,

And slew her not because she was so fair.

In all of life was nothing that atoned

For that hard fate : in hearing of all heaven,

About the iron mountain world he groaned ;

But no return of pitying was given.

The iron echoes in a mighty blast

Flung up his voice toward the sweet abodes

In the blue heaven : his pain was known at last

In every palace of the painless gods.

He had no part but wholly to upbraid

Them,—meters of his evil measured fate,

Who first made fair, then spoiled the thing they made,

And mingled all their gifts with love and hate.

Yet he was moved at length some way to win

Vengeance, and all at once, on her and Him—

That god with whom she rather chose to sin

Than with a man to love : when earth was dim—

Full of unearthly shadows in the night,
He came upon those lovers unaware ;
And fairly caught them locked in their delight :
Limb over limb he bound them in a snare.

For first with all his craft he did invent
A curious toil of meshes, strongly set
With supple fibrous thread and branches bent :
Full tightly they were bounden in that net.

Yet, not until with many a growing gray
And change that wrought among the shifting shade,
Day—softly changing all things—warned away
Their loves and sins, knew they the fate they had.

And when they were but striving to undo
Delicious bonds of love that needs no chain,
Then were they held :—though love had let them go
A stronger bond than love's bade them remain.

And, spite of many a throe of sudden strength,
And all their tortuous striving to be free ;
Yea, they were held :—till the sun came at length,
And all the gods came out of heaven to see.

For there they saw and knew Him from afar,
Vanquished and in no honourable plight,
No less a god than Ares god of war,
Ares the red and royal in all fight ;

But now quite shorn indeed of arms and fame,
Spoiled of his helm and harness of each limb ;
Yea, quite inglorious and brought to shame
For a mere love, with such rude stratagem !

The golden peals of god-like laughter brake
And rang down beautiful beneath the sun ;
For well they saw, indeed, for whose fair sake
Their brother was so fallen and undone.

Phœbus himself, with many a secret pride
Of love—unshamed in any of his loves—
Leant on his golden bow, and laughed aside,
And made some fair light saying that still moves

From lips to lips at all the mirthful feasts
Of them above who have eternal rights
To joys and loves, and wine that never wastes,
And life never to end their days or nights.

And well they knew Hephæstus where, hard by,
He stood, inglorious, daring all their eyes :
The gods all beautiful—they laughed on high
At him, his woes and all his blasphemies.

But surely never was there such a play
For mirth of idle gods !—Nor such a shame
Ever become of love, as on that day
In sight of all the gods their love became !

Who were betrayed so,—in whatever sin
Lips could with lips, face could with face commit,
Yea lips or limbs of lovers could begin,—
That they were bound and kept quite close in it :

For vainly in the meshes of that snare
They strove, with shuddering limbs and starting
cries,
Entangled more with many a mesh of hair
Caught in the manifold intricacies !

So She was found indeed most beautiful,
Yet full of shame and false in all she was ;
So before gods who make and gods who rule,
And him her husband, she was found, alas !

Yet, after all, Hephæstus—he, her lord—

For all that sin, her death he would not have ;

But, for his love's sake and great Phœbus' word,

Loosed her, and made her free, and all forgave.

III.

CLEOPATRA.

I.

Cleopatra Egyptia femina fuit, totius orbis fabula.

SHE made a feast for great Marc Antony :
Her galley was arrayed in gold and light ;
That evening, in the purple sea and sky,
It shone green-golden like a chrysolite.

She was reclined upon a Tyrian couch
Of crimson wools : out of her loosened vest
Set on one shoulder with a serpent brooch
Fell one arm white and half her foamy breast.

And, with the breath of many a fanning plume,
That wonder of her hair that was like wine—
Of mingled fires and purples that consume,
Moved all its mystery of threads most fine—

Moved like some threaded instrument that thrills,
Played on with unseen kisses in the air
Weaving a music from it, working spells
We feel and know not of—so moved her hair :

And under saffron canopies all bright
With clash of lights, e'en to the amber prow,
Crept like enchantments subtle passing sight,
Fragrance and siren music soft and slow.

Amid the thousand viands of the feast,
And Nile fruits piled in panniers, where they vied
With palm-tree dates and melons of the East,
She waited for Marc Antony and sighed.

—Where tarries he?—What gift doth he invent
For costly greeting?—How with look or smile,
Out of love treasures not already spent
Prepares he now her fondness to beguile?

—But lo, he came between the whiles she sighed ;
Scarce the wave murmurs troubling,—lo, most dear,
His galley, with the oars all softly plied,
Warned her with music distant, and drew near.

And on that night—for present,—he did bring
A pearl ; and gave it her with kissing sweet :
“ Would half the Roman empires were this thing,”
He said, “ that I might lay them at your feet.”

Fairly then moved the magic all arrayed
About that fragrant feast ; in every part
The soft Egyptian spells did lend their aid
To work some strange enamouring of the heart.

It was her whim to show him on that night
All she was queen of ; like a perfect dream,
Wherein there should be gathered in one sight
The gold of many lives, as it might seem

Spent and lived through at once,—so she made pass
A splendid pageantry of all her East
Beauteous and captive,—so she did amass
The richness of each land in that one feast.

More jewelries than one could name or know,
Set in a thousand trinkets or in crowns
Each one a sovereignty, in glittering row
Numbered the suppliant lands and all her thrones.

And fairest handmaidens in gracious rank,
Their captive arms enchained with links of gold,
Knelt and poured forth the purple wine she drank,
Or served her there in postures manifold.

And beaded women of a yellow Ind
Stood at the couch, with bended hand to ply
Great silver feathered fans wherein the wind
Gat all the choicest fumes of Araby.

There in the midst, of shape uncouth and hard,
Juggled his arts some Ethiopian churl ;
Changing fierce natures of the spotted pard
Or serpents of the Nile that creep and curl.

And many a minstrelsy of voice and string,
Twining sweet sounds like tendrils delicate,
Seemed to ensnare the moments—seemed to cling
Upon their pleasure all interminate.

But now at length she made them serve her wine

In the most precious goblet,—wine that shed
Great fragrance, in a goblet fair with shine
Of jewels : so they poured the wine out red :

And lo, to mark that more than any feast

And honour Antony,—or for mere pride
To do so proud a vanity, at least
The proudest, vainest, woman ever tried—

She took the unmatched pearl, and, taking, laughed ;

And when they served her now that wine of worth
She cast it gleaming in ; then with the draught
Mingling she drank it in their midst with mirth.

And all that while upon the ocean high,

The golden galley, heavy in its light,
Ruled the hoarse sea-sounds with its revelry—
Changing afar the purples of the night !

IV.

CLEOPATRA.

2.

WHEN Cleopatra saw 'twas time to yield
Even that love, to smite nor be afraid,
Since love shared loss,—yea, when the thing was
sealed,

And all the trust of Antony betrayed ;

And when, before his eyes and in full sight
Of the still striving ships, that gleaming line
Of galleys decked for no rude field of fight
Fled fair and unashamed in the sunshine ;

Then, surely, he fell down as one but blind
Through sudden fallen darkness, even to grope
If haply some least broken he might find
Of all the broken ends of life and hope.

Well, out of all his fates now was there none
But Death, the utter end ; and for no sake,
Save for some last love-look beneath the sun,
Had he delayed that end of all to take !

But now, because love—armed indeed of him
With utter rule of all his destinies—
Had chosen even to slay him for a whim,
And the mere remnant was none else than his,

And since, for sure, the sorest way of death
Were but to die not falling at the feet
Of that one woman who with look or breath
Could change it if she would and make it sweet ;

He chose before all fame he might have caught
With death in foremost fighting, now to cling
Upon her steps who at this last had wrought
His death-wound shameful with a lover's sting.

O how the memories seemed to throb and start
 Welling from out the unstanched past!—seemed
 nigh

Already opening there in all his heart

 The canker wound wherewith he was to die !

And so, though she were quite estranged, and now

 He held no costlier gift to win her with ;

Yet, following, he would find her, and, somehow,

 Lay in her hands that latest gift—his death :

For now all piteously his heart relied

 On a mere hope of love dwindled to this—

To fall some fair waste moment at her side

 And feel perhaps a tear or even a kiss ;

Since surely, in some waste of day or night,

 He thought, the face of love out of the Past,

With look of his, should rise up in her sight

 And make some kind of pleading at the last.

Therefore, when all the heavy heated day

 Of rowing on the waters was nigh done,

And like a track of sweetness past away

 Waned on the wave the last track of the sun,

At length with scarce a sound or warning cry,
Save of the rowers ceasing from the oar,
He reached her side and prayed her pass not by ;
Yea, prayed her bear him yet a little more.

But truly this well-nigh availed to move
Her—Cleopatra—with remorse for all :
She knew not of such pardon, e'en from love ;
Nor craved to look upon his utter fall.

And, first, when it was told her how he came
And sought to reach the galley where she was,
She faltered for a while with fear and shame,
And bade them scarce give way to let him pass :

Only at length he showed them the plain sight
How he was broken and so soon to die ;
Then they fell back all grieved and gave him right,
And scarce believed the man was Antony.

And yet he could not speak ; but lay forlorn
Crouched up about the gilded quivering prow,
Three days, from morn to night and night to morn,
As one whom a sore burden boweth low.

Harshly the sea-sounds taunted him at will,
And seemed in mocking choruses combined ;
Each bitter inward thought was uttered shrill
On shrieking tongues of many a thwart-blown
wind.

And where with onward beak the galley clave
Full many a silver mouth in the blue mere,
The turned up whitened lips of every wave
Rang out a bitter cadence on his ear.

But first awhile his thoughts were taking leave
Sadly of Rome, and all the pageant days ;
For now at length he saw and would believe
The end of triumphs and the end of praise.

And now he did survey, apart from wrath,
The various fates of men both great and small ;
How little reign or glory any hath ;
And how one end comes quickly upon all ;

And thought if love had been—had been quite love.
One little thing in each man's life for bliss,
Then had the grief been paid with sweet enough
And a lost crown forgotten for a kiss ;

While now, as though men played with fall and rise
Of mere base monies of the common mart,
To-day they strove for love as for a prize,
To-morrow compassed fame with every art ;

And one who should but half trust any face
Of seeming fame, or follow love too well,
To set his heart a moment in love's place—
That man should fall,—yea, even as he fell.

And he thought how, since the first fate began,
The lot of every one hath been so cast :
One woman bears and brings him up a man,
Another woman slays him at the last ;

While all so hardly leaguered are men's ways
And love so sharp a snare for them contrives,
The fleeting span of one fair woman's days
Sufficeth many heroes' loves and lives !

—But now, when he had thought all this and more,
He lay there and yet moved not from his place ;
The love of her was in him like a sore,
And he lived waiting to behold her face.

At length they drew nigh to a land by name
Tænarus ; and the third day, at its eve,
In guise of one who mourneth the Queen came
Weeping, and prayed him rise up and forgive.

V.

THE DAUGHTER OF HERODIAS.

MY heart is heavy for each goodly man
Whom crownéd woman or sweet courtezan
Hath slain or brought to greater shames than
death.

But now, O Daughter of Herodias !

I weep for him, of whom the story saith,
Thou didst procure his bitter fate :—Alas,
He seems so fair !—May thy curse never pass !

Where art thou writhing? Herod's palace-floor
Has fallen through: there shalt thou dance no more;

And Herod is a worm now. In thy place,
—Salome, Viper!—do thy coils yet keep

That woman's flesh they bore with such a grace?
Have thine eyes still the love-lure hidden deep,
The ornament of tears, they could not weep?

Thou wast quite perfect in the splendid guile
Of woman's beauty; thou hadst the whole smile

That can dishonour heroes, and recal
Fair saints prepared for heaven back to hell:

And He, whose unlived glory thou mad'st fall
All beautiful and spotless, at thy spell,
Was great and fit for thee by whom he fell.

O, is it now sufficing sweet to thee—

Through all the long uncounted years that see

The undistinguished lost ones waste away—
To twine thee, biting, on those locks that bleed,

As bled they through thy fingers on that day?
Or hast thou, all unhallowed, some fierce need
Thy soul on his anointed grace to feed?

Or hast thou, rather, for that serpent's task
Thou didst accomplish in thy woman-mask,
Some perfect inconceivable reward
Of serpent's slimy pleasure?—all the thing
Thou didst beseech thy master, who is Lord
Of those accursèd hosts that creep and sting,
To give thee for the spoil thou shouldst bring?

He was a goodly spoil for thee to win !
—Men's souls and lives were wholly dark with sin ;
And so God's world was changed with wars and gold,
No part of it was holy ; save, maybe,
The desert and the ocean as of old :—
But such a spotless way of life had he,
His soul was as the desert or the sea.

I think he had not heard of the far towns ;
Nor of the deeds of men, nor of kings' crowns ;
Before the thought of God took hold of him,
As he was sitting dreaming in the calm
Of one first noon, upon the desert's rim,
Beneath the tall fair shadows of the palm,
All overcome with some strange inward balm.

But then, so wonderful and lovely seemed
That thought, he straight became as though he
 dreamed

A vast thing false and fair, which day and night
Absorbed him in some rapture—very high

Above the common swayings of delight
And general yearnings, that quite occupy
Men's passions, and suffice them till they die :

Yea, soon as it had entered him—that thought
Of God—he felt that he was being wrought

All holy : more and more it filled his heart ;
And seemed, indeed, a spirit of pure flame

Set burning in his soul's most inward part.
And from the Lord's great wilderness there came
A mighty voice calling on him by name.

He numbered not the changes of the year,
The days, the nights, and he forgot all fear

Of death : each day he thought there should
 have been

A shining ladder set for him to climb

Athwart some opening in the heavens, e'en
To God's eternity, and see, sublime—
His face whose shadow passing fills all time.

But he walked through the ancient wilderness.

O, there the prints of feet were numberless

And holy all about him! And quite plain

He saw each spot an angel silvershod

Had lit upon; where Jacob too had lain

The place seemed fresh,—and, bright and lately trod,

A long track showed where Enoch walked with God.

And often, while the sacred darkness trailed

Along the mountains smitten and unveiled

By rending lightnings,—over all the noise

Of thunders and the earth that quaked and bowed

From its foundations—he could hear the voice

Of great Elias prophesying loud

To Him whose face was covered by a cloud.

Already he was shown so perfectly

The awful mystic grace and sanctity

Of all the earth, there was no part his feet

With sandal covering might dare to tread;

Because that in it he was sure to meet

The fair sword-bearing angels, or some dread

Eternal prophet numbered with the dead.

So he believed that he should purify
His body, till the sin of it should die,
 And the unfailing spirit and great word
Of One—who is too bright to be beheld,
 And in his speech too fearful to be heard
By mortal man—should come down and be held
In him as in those holy ones of eld.

And to believe in this was rapture more
Than any that the thought of living bore
 To tempt him : so the pleasant days of youth
Were but the days of striving and of prayer ;
 And all the beauty of those days, forsooth,
He counted as an evil or a snare,
And would have left it in the desert there.

Ah, spite of all the scourges that had bit
So fiercely his fair body, branding it
 With many a painful over-written vow
Of perfect sanctity—what man shall say
 How often, weak with groanings, he would bow
Before the angels of the place, and pray
That all his body might consume away ?

For through whole bitter days it seemed in vain
That all the mighty desert had no stain

Of sin around him ; that the burning breaths
Went forth from the eternal One, and rolled

For ever through it, filling it with deaths,
And plagues, and fires ; that he did behold
The earthquakes and the wonders manifold :

It seemed in vain that all the place was bright
Ineffably with that unfading light

No man who worketh evil can abide ;
That he could see too with his open eyes

Fair troops of deathless ones, and those that died
In martyrdoms, or went up to the skies
In fiery cars—walk there with no disguise ;—

It seemed in vain that he was there alone
With no man's sin to tempt him but his own ;—

Since in his body he did bear about
A seeming endless sin he could not quell

With the most sharp coercion, nor cast out
Through any might of prayer. O, who can tell—
Save God—how often in despair he fell ?

The very stones seemed purer far than he ;
And every naked rock and every tree

Looked great and calm, composed in one long
thought

Of holiness ; each bird and creeping thing

Rejoiced in bearing some bright sign that taught
The legend of an ancient minist'ring
To some fair saint of old there sojourning.

Yea, all the dumb things and the creatures there
Were grand, and some way sanctified ; most fair

The very lions stood, and had no shame
Before the angels ; and what time were poured

The floods of the Lord's anger forth, they came
Quite nigh the lightnings of the Mount and roared
Among the roaring thunders of the Lord :

Yet He—while in him day by day, divine,
The clear inspirèd thought went on to shine,

And heaven was opening every radiant door
Upon his spirit—He, in that fair dress

Of weak humanity his senses bore,
Did feel scarce worthy to be there, and less
Than any dweller in the wilderness.

Wherefore his limbs were galled with many a stone;
And often he had wrestled all alone

With their fair beauty, conquering the pride
And various pleasure of them with some quick

And hard inflicted pain that might abide,—
Assailing all the sense with constant prick
Until the lust or pride fell faint and sick.

Natheless there grew and stayed upon his face
The wonderful unconquerable grace

Of a young man made beautiful with love ;
Because the thought of God was wholly spread

Like love upon it ; and still fair above
All crownèd heads of kings remained his head
Whereon the halo of the Lord was shed.

Ah, how long was it, since the first red rush
Of that surpassing thought made his cheek blush

With pleasure, as he sat—a tender child—
And wondered at the desert, and the long

Rough prickly paths that led out to the wild
Where all the men of God, holy and strong,
Had dwelt and purified themselves—how long?—

Before he rose up from his knees one day,
And felt that he was purified as they ;

That he had trodden out the sin at last,
And that the light was filling him within ?

How many of the months and years had past
Uncounted ?—But the place he was born in
No longer knew him : no man was his kin.

O then it was a most sweet, holy will
That came upon him, making his soul thrill

With joy indeed, and with a perfect trust,—
For he soon thought of men and of the king

All tempted in the world, with gold and lust,
And women there, and every fatal thing,
And none to save their souls from perishing—

And so he vowed that he would go forth straight
From God there in the desert, with the great

Unearthliness upon him, and adjure
The nations of the whole world with his voice ;

Until they should resist each pleasant lure
Of gold and woman, and make such a choice
As his, that they might evermore rejoice.

Thus beautiful and good was He, at length,
Who came before King Herod in his strength,
And shouted to him with a great command
To purify himself, and put away

That unclean woman set at his right hand ;
And after all to bow himself and pray,
And be in terror of the Judgment Day !

He never had seen houses like to that
Fair-columned, cedar-built one where sat
King Herod. Flawless cedar was each beam,
Wrought o'er with flaming brass : along the wall
Great brazen images of beasts did gleam,
With wondrous flower-works and palm trees tall ;
And folded purples hung about it all.

He never had beheld so many thrones,
As those of ivory and precious stones
Whereon the noble company was raised
About the king :—he never had seen gems
So costly, nor so wonderful as blazed
Upon their many crowns and diadems,
And trailed upon their garments' trodden hems :

But he had seen in mighty Lebanon
The cedars no man's axe hath lit upon ;
 And he had often worshipped, falling down
In dazzling temples opened straight to him,
 Where One who had great lightnings for His crown
Was suddenly made present, vast and dim
Through crowded pinions of the Cherubim !

Wherefore he had no fear to stand and shout
To all men in the place, and there to flout
 Those fair and fearful women who were seen
Quite triumphing in that work of their smile
 To shame a goodly king. And he cast, e'en
A sudden awe that undid for a while
The made-up shameless visages of guile.

And when Herodias—that many times
Polluted one, assured now in all crimes
 Past fear or turning—when she, her fierce tongue
Thrice forked with indignation, hotly spoke
 Quick wild beseeching words, wherewith she clung
To Herod, praying him by some death-stroke
To do her vengeance there before all folk—

Ah, spite of every urging that her hate
Did put into her lips,—so fair and great
Seemed that accuser standing weaponless,
Yet wholly terrible with his bright speech
As 'twere some sword of flaming holiness,
That no man dared to join her and beseech
His death ; but dread came somehow upon each.

For he was surely terrible to see
So plainly sinless, so divinely free
To judge them ; being in a perfect youth,
Yet walking like an angel in a man
Reproving all men with inspired truth.
And Herod himself spoke not, but began
To tremble : through his soul the warning ran.

—Then *that Salome* did put off the shame
Of her mere virgin girlhood, and became
A woman ! Then she did at once essay
Her beauty's magic, and unfold the wings
Of her enchanted feet,—to have men say
She slew *him*—born indeed for wondrous things.
Her dance was fit to ruin saints or kings.

O, her new beauty was above all praise !
She came with dancing in shy devious ways,
 And while she danced she sang.
The virgin bandlet of her forehead brake,
Her hair came round her like a shining snake ;
To loving her men's hearts within them sprang
 The while she danced and sang.

Her long black hair danced round her like a snake
Allured to each charmed movement she did make ;
 Her voice came strangely sweet ;
She sang, " O, Herod, wilt thou look on me—
Have I no beauty thy heart cares to see ?"
And what her voice did sing her dancing feet
 Seemed ever to repeat.

She sang, " O, Herod, wilt thou look on me ?
What sweet I have, I have it all for thee ;"
 And through the dance and song
She freed and floated on the air her arms
Above dim veils that hid her bosom's charms :
The passion of her singing was so strong
 It drew all hearts along.

Her sweet arms were unfolded on the air,
They seemed like floating flowers the most fair—
 White lilies the most choice ;
And in the gradual bending of her hand
There lurked a grace that no man could withstand ;
Yea, none knew whether hands, or feet, or voice,
 Most made his heart rejoice.

The veils fell round her like thin coiling mists
Shot through by topaz suns, and amethysts,
 And rubies she had on ;
And out of them her jewelled body came,
And seemed to all quite like a slender flame
That curled and glided, and that burnt and shone
 Most fair to look upon.

Then she began, on that well-polished floor,
Whose stones seemed taking radiance more and more
 From steps too bright to see,
A certain measure that was like some spell
Of winding magic, wherein heaven and hell
Were joined to lull men's souls eternally
 In some mid ecstasy :

For it was so inexplicably wrought
Of soft alternate motions, that she taught
 Each sweeping supple limb,
And in such intricate and wondrous ways
With bendings of her body, that the praise
Lost breath upon men's lips, and all grew dim
 Save her so bright and slim.

And through the swift mesh'd serpents of her hair
That lash'd and leapt on each place white and fair
 Of bosom or of arm,
And through the blazing of the numberless
And whirling jewelled fires of her dress,
Her perfect face no passion could disarm
 Of its reposeful charm.

Her head oft drooped as in some languid death
Beneath brim tastes of joy, and her rich breath
 Heaved faintly from her breast ;
Her long eyes, opened fervently and wide,
Did seem with endless rapture to abide
In some fair trance through which the soul possest
 Love, ecstasy, and rest.

But lo—while each man fixed his eyes on her,
And was himself quite fillèd with the stir

His heart did make within—

The place was full of devils everywhere:
They came in from the desert and the air ;
They came from all the palaces of sin,
And each heart they were in :

They lurked beneath the purples, and did crawl
Or crouch in unseen corners of the hall,

Among the brass and gold ;

They climbed the brazen pillars till they lined
The chamber fair ; and one went up behind
The throne of Herod—fearful to behold—
The Serpent king of old.

Yea, too, before those blinded men there went
Some even to Salome ; and they lent

Strange charms she did not shun.

She stretched her hand forth, and inclined her ear ;
She knew those men would neither see nor hear :

A devil did support her head, and one

Her steps' light fabric spun.

O, then her voice with singing all unveiled,
 In no trained timid accents, straight assailed

King Herod's open heart :

The amorous supplication wove and wound
 Soft deadly sins about it ; the words found
 Fair traitor thoughts there,—singing snakes did dart

Their poison in each part.

She sang, “ O look on me, and look on Love :

We three are here together, and above—

What heaven may there be ?

None for thine heart without this spell of mine,

Yea, this my beauty, yea, these limbs that shine

And make thy senses shudder ; and for me,

No heaven without thee !

“ O, all the passion in me on this day

Rises into one song to sweep away

The breakers of Love's bond ;

For is it not a pleasant bond indeed,

And made of all the flowers in life's mead ?

And is not Love a master fair and fond ?

And is not Death beyond ?

“ O, who are these that will adjure thee, King,
To put away this tender flower-thing,

 This love that is thy bliss ?

Dost thou think thou canst live indeed, and dare
The joyless remnant of pale days, the bare
Hard tomb, and feed through cold eternities

 Thy heart without one kiss ?

“ Dost thou think empty prayers shall glad thy lips
Kept red and living with perpetual sips

 Of Love’s rich cup of wine ?

That thy fair body shall not fall away,
And waste among the worms that bitter day
Thou hast no lover round thy neck to twine

 Fond arms like these of mine ?

“ I say they are no prophets,—very deaths,
And plagues, and rottenness, do use their breaths

 Who speak against delight ;

Pale distant slayers of humanity
Have tainted them, and sent them forth to try
Weak lures to make man give up joyous right

 Of days for empty night.

“ I tell thee, in their wilderness shall be
No herbs enough for food for them and thee,
 No rock to give thee drink ;
I tell thee, all their heavens are a cheat,
Or but a mirage to betray thy feet,
And draw thee quicker to some grave’s dread brink
 Where thou shalt fall and sink.

“ Turn rather unto me, and hear my voice
Against these desert howlings, and rejoice :
 Now surely do I crave
To treble this my beauty, and embalm
My words with deathless thrill, singing the psalm
Of pleasure to thee, King,—so I may save
 Thy fair days from this grave.

“ Yea, now of all my beauty will I strive
With these mad prophesiers till I drive
 Their ravings from thine ear :
Against their rudeness I will set my grace,
My softness, and the magic of my face ;
And spite of all their curses thou shalt hear
 And let my voice draw near :

“ Against their loud revilings I will try
The long low-speaking pleadings of my sigh,
 All my heart’s tender way ;
Against their deserts—here, before thine eyes
My love shall open thee a paradise,
Where, if thou comest, thou shalt surely stay
 And seek no better way :

“ And rather than these haters of thy joy
Should anyhow allure thee to destroy
 Thy heart’s prosperity,—
O, I will throw my woman’s arms entwined
About thy body ; ere thy lips can find
One word of yielding, I will kiss them dry :
 —And failing, let me die !

“ But look on me, for it is in my soul
To make the measure of thy glory whole—
 With many goodly things
To crown thee, yea, with pleasure and with love,
Till there shall scarcely be a name above
King Herod’s, in the mouth of one who sings
 The fame of mighty kings :

“ For see how great and fair a realm is this—
My untried love—the never conquered bliss

All hoarded in my breast ;

My beauty and my love were jewels meet

To make the glory of a king complete,

And I,—O thou of kingship half-possesst—

Can crown thee with the rest !

“ I stand before thee—on my head the crown
Of all thou lackest yet in thy renown—

Ah, King, take this of me !

And in my hand I bear a brimming cup

That sparkles ; to thine eyes I hold it up :

A royal draught of life-long pleasure—see,

The wine is fit for thee !

“ Ah, wilt thou pass me ? Wilt thou let me give
Thy fair life to some meaner man to live ?

Nay, here—if I am sweet—

Thou shalt not. I will save thee with the sight

Of all my sweetness, save thee with the might

And charm of all my singing lips' deceit,

Or with my dancing feet.

“ I have indeed some power. A lure lies
Within my tender lips—behind my eyes—

Concealed in all my way ;

And while I seem entreating, I compel,
Yea, while I do but plead, I use a spell—
Ah secretly—but surely. Who are they

That ever turn away ?

“ Now, thou hast barely seen bright glittering
The gilded cup of pleasures that I swing

Before thy reeling gaze,—

The deep beginnings of sweet drunkenness
Are in thy heart already, more or less,
And on thy soul deliciously there preys

A thirst no joy allays.

“ Dost thou not feel, each time my long hair sweeps
The glowing floor, how through thy being creeps

A vague yet sweet desire ?—

How writhes in every sense a tiny snake
Of pleasure biting till it seems to wake
A fever of sharp lusts that never tire,

Unquenchable as fire ?

“ Is there not wrought a madness in thy brain
Each time my thin veils part and close again—

Each time their flying ring

Is seen a moment's space encircling me
With filmy changes—each time, rapidly
Rolled down, their cloud-like gauzes billowing
About my limbs they fling ?

“ Ah, seek not in this moment some cold will ;
Attend to no false pratings that would kill

Thy heart, and make thee fall :

But now a little lean to me, and fear
My charming. Ah, thy fame to me is dear !
Some wound of mine, when me thou couldst not call,
Might slay thee after all.

“ For even while I sing, the unseen grace
Of Love descending hath filled all this place

With most strong prevalence ;

His miracle is raging in the breasts
Of all these men, and mightily he rests
On me and thee. His power is too intense,
No curse shall drive him hence.

“—O, Love, invisible, eternal God,
In whose delicious ways all men have trod,
 This day Thou truly hast
My heart : thy inspiration fills my tongue
With great angelic madness ; I have sung
Set words that in my bosom thou hast cast—
 Thine am I to the last !

“ My feet are like two liquid flames that leap
For joy at thee ; I feel thy spirit sweep—
 Yea, like a southern wind—
Through all the enchanted fibres of my soul ;
I am a harp o'er which thy vast breaths roll,
And one day thou shalt break me : none shall find
 A wreck of me behind.

“ And now all palpitating, O I pray
Thy utmost passion while I cry—away
 With all Love's enemies !
A man—borne up between the closing wings
Of two eternities of unknown things,
May catch this seraph charmer as he flies,
 And hold him till he dies ;

“ And yet some bitter ones, whom coming night
Hath wholly entered, grudge man this small right
 Of joy, and seek to fill
His rushing moment with the monstrous hiss
Of shapeless terrors, poisoning the bliss
Brief nestled in his bosom—merely till
 Forced out by its death chill !

“ What voice is this the envious wilderness
Hath sent among us foully to distress
 And haunt our lives with fear ?
What vulture, shrieking on the scent of death—
What yelping jackal—what insidious breath
Of pestilence hath ventured to draw near,
 And enter even here ?

“ No kindred flesh of fair humanity
Yon fiend hath, seeking through lives doomed to die
 Death’s foretaste to infuse :
His body is but raised up from the slain
Unburied thousands that long years have lain
About the desert : Death himself doth choose
 His pale disguise to use.

“ But, even though he be from some new God,
He shall not turn us who love’s ways have trod,
Nor make us break love’s vow.

Nay, rather, if a single beauty dwells
In me, if in that beauty there be spells
To win my will of any man—O thou,
King Herod, hear me now !—

“ Let *it* be for his ruin ! Ah, let me,
With all in me thou countest fair to see,
Procure this and no more !

If yet, with tender prevalence, my voice
May ask a thing of thee—this is my choice,
Though thou wouldst buy my sweets with all thy
store—

This all I sell them for.

“ Yea, are there lures of softness in my eyes ?
My eyes are—for his death. Is my heart’s prize
A seeming fair reward ?

My virgin heart is—for his blood here shed ;
Its passion—for the falling of his head ;
And on that man my kiss shall be outpoured
Who slays him with the sword !”

Invisible—in supernatural haze,
Of shapes that seem not shapes to human gaze—
 The devils were half awed as they did stand
Around her ; each one in his separate hell
All inwardly was forced to praise her well :
 And every man was fain to lose his hand
 Or do all that sweet woman might command.

There was a tumult.—Cloven foot and scale
Of fiend with iron heel and coat of mail
 Were rolled and hustled in the rage to slay
That fair young Saviour : when they murdered him
And brought his head, still beautiful—though dim
 And drenched with blood—the aureole did play
 Above it, slowly vanishing away.

I weep to think of him and his fair light
So quenched—of him thrust into some long night
 Of unaccomplishment so soon, alas !
And Thou, who on that ancient palace floor
Didst dance, where dost thou writhe now evermore—
 Salome, Daughter of Herodias ?
 O woman-viper—may thy curse ne'er pass !

VI.

HELEN.

AFTER long years of all that too sweet sin
That held her ever in the far strange land,
She felt her heart was stricken, felt begin
Great strokes of sorrow smiting like a hand.

She turned away from all the long delight
Which had so filled and blinded all the past ;
The sweet sin rose up bitter in the night
And turned the love to sickness at the last.

She and her lover in their goodly halls
Gazed on each other no more the old way ;
About the face of each clung shadowy palls
Of sadness all unchanged through many a day.

And now, along the fair courts marble-floored,
Each met the looks of other all aghast
With rueful thoughts unstanch'd yet ne'er out-
poured ;
And their trailed robes touched mournful as they
passed.

Into the lonely paths of Ida sweet
For sorrow, dark and very sweet with leaves,
Came Helen : weary at her bosom beat
The sad thoughts all the summer noons and
eves.

Strange : as her eyes sought where the sea was held
Gathered into dim distances of blue,
Down in her heart a dim Past she beheld,
Wherein were memories like an ocean too.

And strange, there, long up-pent, the memories
stirred
Like waves long rolling : in her heart at length
All the fair time from which her years had erred
Came up against her now with all its strength.

Back from the earliest love-time there was sent
A tide of all the long untasted sweet
Of days forgotten, summers that were spent,
And eves when love and lover used to meet ;
And heavy wafts of perfume that was known
E'en from those dark familiar laurel trees
That hid where love and lover were alone
Rolled back upon the heart with sore disease :
And from the early home there came no less
Than the reproach of each remembered gaze
Of friends, and want of all the happiness
They gave her in their simple Spartan ways.
And now her heart strove, longing, to divine
The several thoughts of her they had devised
In separate years that passed by with no sign ;
Yea, to have known their pain she would have
prized :
For now when toward them her heart was wrought
Quite weak, and from no tenderness forbore,
They seemed all strong against her, with hard thought
And faces turning from her evermore.

And with the vision of them so deceived
Came piteous memories of the waning face
Of the Old man who sat all shamed and grieved
Lonely beside the hearth's familiar place.

Before her soon in very semblance 'gleamed
The Spartan homestead there unaltered, plain,
With all the household things; yea, till she dreamed
All were yet to begin that way again,

And Menelaus the next golden morn
Were still to come for her with wedlock blest,
As though not all deserted and forlorn
He strayed—the lone man without love or rest.

But most she yearned between her fear and love,
To see him now—divining what was due
To wrath and sorrowing to change and move
His features from the fashion that she knew :

For now the first time after all those years
The face seemed anyhow her way to seek ;
—But turned upon her now with all its tears
And vengeance of reproach at length to wreak ;

—And seemed to hold her through her love come
back,

Unforeseen, and how come, she could not tell ;
So that the wrath of it, the grief could rack
Her heart,—yet her heart craved therewith to
dwell.

He was her husband—it should ever seem ;
And that home, surely it was still her home ;
And years since some long voyage or a dream ;
And now no more the heart was fain to roam :

Nay, but was true to where it felt begin
Love and the rosy ecstasies so brief ;
And that was surely love and the rest sin,
That all delight and all the other grief.

And now though none should render her heart's
right

In any fair place where she used to sit,
She would have prayed for a mere alien's sight
Of all it was so little pain to quit :

Just to draw near, some silent hour, alone,
Unheralded, unwelcomed, and behold
Her husband and remember him her own,
And be quite near him only as of old :

And perchance, for some grief that was exprest
Plainly upon his face, she might have dared
To enter in, and after all been blest
Some remnant of his pity to have shared.

—Alas, too surely, for long years, all thought
And love of her had perished from his heart ;
Until on all her memory were wrought
Dishonour, and with him she had no part ;

—And this the while, so held of alien joys,
She spared no thought for him and for his pain,
Nor fancied the least echo of his voice
Sent forth a thousand times to her in vain ;

When, might-be many a time, his earnest grief
Scent it so truly seeking her quite near,
Vainly it fell on some dumb flower or leaf
Beside her, never cherished in her ear.

And she thought how one day—she heeding nought—
The last voice on the fruitless air was borne
And died almost a taunt, and the last thought
Of her was changed to hate or utter scorn.

And she thought how since that time, day by day,
The man had learnt to live without her need,
And been quite happy perhaps many a way,
All without loving her or taking heed.

And that which was the great woe had scarce grown
In any gradual way ; but with a burst
Her life was torn apart from peace, and thrown
Far from the love that seemed its own at first

All for a mere girl's fancy too—a whim
For foreign faces and some ruddier south,
And no real choice to die away from him
Who won the truest troth in love and youth.

Now it was bitter to be quite outcast,
And bitter—when this thought of dying cost
Her heart—to reach him no more at the last
Than in mere rumour, as of one long lost.

She looked upon the great sea rolled between
Herself and Lacedæmon : but the Past,
The sins and all the falseness that had been
Seemed like an ocean deeper and more vast.

VII.

A TROTH FOR ETERNITY.

—**S**O, Woman ! I possess you. Yes, at length,
Once wholly and for ever you are mine !

That cursèd burden on my memory,
Your whole past life's betrayal—let it go :
Ay, let it perish, and, for me at least,
Let life begin this moment, though we die
But three hours hence !

Is this your little voice
My Love, enthralling, winning my whole faith
With mere increasing sweetness in its tones,
Dissolving, exorcising, as it used,

Ah too infallibly, the phantom thing,
The doubt, the dread within me? ah, my Sweet,
Is this once more your voice assuring me—
With some rare music rather than one word
Of those fair whispered oaths of constancy ;
Yea, till, as ever, I am come to smile
And glory in you, and believe you pure—
All mine, for ever, past a change in thought?

But no ! *It is the little voice of the Steel*
Here safe against my breast and fairly hid :
The Steel is singing to me, very low,
A tender song entrancing me ;—O joy !
The Steel says you will ne'er escape me more ;
You will be true to me ; you will be mine ;
No man shall touch you after me ; no face,
However strangely fair, shall have the art
To draw one look from you, to charm and rouse
That wondrous little snake of treachery
That was for ever lurking for me—sure
To spring upon me out of the least look
Or promise, safe to be curled up beneath

The simplest seeming offering in your hand.

Yes, 'tis a thing at length as good as this
The steel is singing to me : did you hear,
You should but love it—since it pleads so well
It makes me put whole faith in you once more.
For now three days and nights indeed—while I,
Contending for you with the love I gave
Against the curse I owed you, raged and thought
It was my madness—O this little voice
Was striving with me, singing all the time,
Upon a low sweet soothing tune, strange words
Of promise that seemed like the distant taunts
Of all my past beliefs, and that I sought
To cover with my curses ; till, last night,
My soul grew faint with hearing them—how sweet,
How full of good they were. Then I fell still,
Yea, stunned, and with my head upon the ground ;
And through the shut bleared darkness of my eyes,
I seemed to see the room about me lit
And fearful, and the Sword from off the wall
Unscabbarded before me in the midst,
Most terrible and living, and in light—

Just like a great archangel with the glare
Of burning expiations full on him.

O then my soul did call upon the Steel ;
And the Steel heard and swore to me. My soul
Tore forth the hidden-rooted love of thee,
Thy treasured words—each one a cruel worm
That gnaws me through for ever, thy fair face
From the first inmost shrine, thy early kiss,
Thy separate falsenesses, all my despair,
My utter helplessness—and flung them down,
The very writhing entrails of my life
Become one inward horror to be borne
No longer. And there came about me, loud,
The mocking of a thousand impious tongues,
That seemed to clash and rattle hideously
From ancient hollow sepulchres of men
Long buried and forgotten ; for my love
Their gibe was, for my faith, for my despair,
For my long blindness : and at last I knew,
And, understanding, called with a great voice
Upon the Steel : and the Steel heard me there,
And swore to me—for you and me and God !

*Sing on, O little voice : She cannot hear ;
There is a pact between us.*

Now I stand

And feel her eyes' soft element within,
Upon, around me, melting away life
Into these few full throbbing moments.—Lo !
Her tears again—her disavowal clean
Of any thought of falseness. Lo ! her words—
I might have lived beside her all these days
In perfect joy ; words, blandishments and tears
Already staggering me with their old might
Of coiling fascinations ; and one tear
A drop that, falling straight into my heart,
Fills it too full for speaking a long time
The ready thing of pardon and of love.

See ! am I Lord here ?—This fair sight of Her,
Working the whole impassioned prodigy
As 'twere of all her beauty, just to win
Me this time and, at any cost, be queen
Of this one present, as of many pasts—
Hath ever it been fairer, more complete ?

Who else hath had her more and called her his
Than here I have her calling herself mine ?
I would indeed he might draw near just now,
Yea, void of feigning, in some wonted way,
And feel a cold look from her plant him there
Outside the circle where this molten love
Of her whole smile is showered upon me,
And know her no more his now than mine then.

But what do I here with a thought like this ?
Those men I deemed my rivals—what are they
To me now ? Why I could put them to shame
And taunt them now myself for insolent
Pretenders who have never known what 'tis
To conquer love.—Ay, what compared with me
Seem all the famous lovers of great queens
Or splendid cruel mistresses, whose woes—
Deceived, betrayed, reviled—have made them shine
With some bright share of every age's tears ?
What but mere fools ? weak sufferers of wrong
From creatures whom they held in their own
hands ?

Or passionless, or lacking any strength
To seize their fair worlds passing them so nigh
Rather than linger in some sickly trail
Of sweetness left behind and die of shame ?
O all ye Messalinas of old time—
Ye Helens, Cleopatras, ye Dalilahs,
Ye Maries, ye Lucrezias, Catharines—
Fair crowned or uncrowned—courtezans alike
Who played with men a calculated game—
Your moves their heart-wounds, deaths and ruins—

sure

Of your inconstancy and their soft loves,
Had I been lover in the stead of them,
Methinks the histories of you had been changed,
And some of your worst falsenesses redeemed
By flawless faithfulness to one last love.

But now I am content, I have love here ;
And I thank God for love—yea, is it sweet ?
Yea, is it best of all his gifts to man ?
—I see her splendid smile there—feel her arms
Already coming round me !—Who but I
Can answer ? Who but I have had it whole

Like this? (*The Steel is singing' to me now,
Still hidden in my breast—a low sweet song.*)

Ah, this time there is no doubt! 'tis all true:
Her arms may fold me—fondle me, and I
May wholly yield myself to their caress
Quite sure it leaves no atom in reserve
For any other after me. And lo,
She is right worthy of a greater one
Than all the lovers that have ever loved
And, trembling, lost their women and themselves:
For splendour—such as stains for me and turns
My eyes disgusted from the vaunted white
Of many a bosom impudently bared—
Is in that bosom closely veiled, whose veils
I may undo—yea now, and with these hands;
It is my right. And then, O joy, to know
That this, so much more wonderful than those,
Shall ne'er be seen by anyone but me!
(Ah, sing on little voice!) But, as I said,
—Yes, she is worthy!—Come to me, my Sweet:
You have the greatest beauty God has made.

I think that. Let me kiss your forehead once,
Twice, thrice, and say it is diviner white,
And hallowed with a brighter radiant grace
Than Cleopatra's was, and swear therewith
I kiss it with a passion greater far
Than Antony's was : yea, let me write there
This thing in kisses that none can efface.

" Ah, you believe me now, dear love ?" she says :
Yes : I say yes. (*Sing on ! 'Twas you sang : yes ;
You bade me answer so. I trust you most.*)

" Dear Love, let us go lie upon that bed.

" I should delight to know it just the grave,

" So I might keep this faith and happiness,

" That yours—this mine—both safe for evermore,

" So I might lie down sure that no mischance,

" No doubt, no calumny, could come to change

" Me—yours, you—mine, and peace for evermore."

She says this, and she leads me by the hand.

Her head is like a lily drooping down.

—My passion ! Yea I will not baulk thee now :

I need not : for I feel that what I am
Is something more than man, that conquers man.
What is it? I know not : a flame, a thought ;
But cold, but calm, unalterable, pure,
As far above the fume of the base lust
That dulls and levels all men, as, perhaps,
Was that strange flame or thought that made Man
first

And Woman then to bring the man to nought,
Which fate I, who indeed am not a god,
Who am not Hercules, nor Samson, no,
Nor Antony—which fate I yet will change.
Nay, passion, rather I will urge thee on ;
For I shall be above thee all the time
A cold impartial watcher, hard to foil,
Attentive that thou gettest all thine own
Not tampered with—lest, in some little thing,
Thou art betrayed, or with a semblance served,
Yea, for a blind fool as thou ever wert.

—O take thy fill of looking on this snow
In which thy heart finds such delicious death ;

Do out thine utmost revel on the bloom
Of this rare flower's beauty, now at full ;
Whose summer is just perfected to-night
And laid before thee, heightened with the tint
Of first mysterious sadness, like a touch
Of far-off autumns. Do not shun that mouth :
For there, indeed, a thing most dainty-sweet—
The last kiss that was sown a precious seed
By Love at the beginning—waits for thee,
The fullest, the most perfect of them all.
The earth will never fashion forth, and Love
Will never with his summer paint again
So beautiful a flower.

I am clasped
With such arms as I would might hold me so
For evermore in heaven. All around,
The strange unearthly fragrance of her hair
Is coming up, and, with an element
Divine as some transparent rosy cloud,
Enwrapping both of us ; ay, and, as though—
A very cloud of magic—it had borne

Us, lifted far away from thought, and life,
And days, and earthliness—we seem to voyage
Through most ethereal atmospheres, and seas
Upon whose soft sustaining waves we drift,
And draw no sound from either distant shore
Of ending or beginning : and the bliss,
Unspeakable and perfect, that we feel
Seems making and remaking evermore
Our souls through this eternity.

Alas !

One little thread—I strive in vain to break—
Is holding me : a memory, a thought,
The pricking of a half-numbed wound through sleep,
The constant teasing of a wingéd thing,
The bitterness wherewith some ceaseless fang
Of life gnaws through, and breaks our dream of it—
Some such pursues and racks me. But 'tis well :
I know the dream is mine to make my own ;
I know what dragon guards this paradise,
And with what paltry lies he fools mankind.
Ah, how the universe must jeer to see

All men so smoothly cheated of their own !—
And when I slay this dragon, I have all.

I cannot stir now. Many a knotted tress
Is on me, like a thousand-threaded chain
Twined many times about my limbs. I dream
No more : I feel her small and gliding hands
Seek mine ; and while the burning rapid words
Her full heart furnishes hiss in mine ear,
My sight is peering blindly through the dark
Of her vast hair—a cavernous abyss
Of blackness traversed by mad shooting sparks
Or fearful gleams of blood.—What things she says !
“—Let this be as it were my bridal night,
“If you doubt all the Past. I am yours now ;
“Take this for the beginning, and trust me ;
“I will be yours for ever,—not a look,
“A word, a thought shall e'er dishonour you.”—
And, if I had not heard this very thing
Before, once, twice, innumerable times,
I should not plunge as I do now, my head
Still deeper in the fathomless dark hair,

And see tears falling from me—as it seems—
To fall on through a drear eternity.

But, hark, another voice ! Whence comes it ?
—Whence ?

From here, beneath the pillow ; yes, 'tis harsh
And not like hers ; but speaks a sweet thing—this :
I swear for Her it shall be so : trust Me !

Ah, yes—my Love, my own, I answer you ;
I part with all the Past, forgive, deny,
Refuse to see it. All my soul is yours ;
I never loved a moment in this world,
But what was love was wholly meant for you.
Yea, even before I saw you as you are,
Or knew your name, the vaguest breaths of love
Were but sent forward to me from the days
When you should come, preparing me for you.
I know in truth there never was a time
Wherein I saw no part of you—nor sign
To love you by ; for all my sun, my light,
My flowers, my world would be the saddest blank,

The day you were not ; you have these in you,
And are yourself in them ; and, on the day
You go, you take them all away with you ;
And so 'twas you I saw when I saw them
And said :—" *That Lady mine* shall have a head
Like yonder drooping lily on whose white
The summer's breath may never set a stain ;
And She shall have a heaven for her hair
As deep, and dark, and splendid, as the one
I dream beneath ; and She shall have such eyes
As ever seem to me those still blue lakes
I come on in the twilight of the woods
And find wide open under the thick fringe
Of violets—that fascinate me so
With gazing on me ; yes, and, for her smile,
She shall but use that magic of the sun
That so transfigures all the day with light,
And gives my heart already such a thrill
As if She smiled at me :"—my Love, 'twas you
I saw then, dreamed of, waited for ; 'twas you ;
My heart attests it, looking on you now.—
So this of mine is such a perfect love

You see, it could not change nor turn away ;—
It is the only love God made for you,
As you He made for me and from the first
Revealed to me. Therefore it cannot be
That you are false to me,—that I no way
Can save and keep you mine—you whom He gave
To me for ever, to be brought as mine
Before Him at the last. My precious one,
You are all worthy of me—are my crown
Untarnished, perfect, for you have not sinned ;
'Tis I have sinned,—not being strong at once
To save both pure in you. Did not your lips
Completely make you mine of your own will ?
Did you not swear yourself to me at first,
Yea, in God's name, before him ? So that I—
Yes, I, have let you, all against your heart,
Be brought to do sad things you would have
shunned ;
Because I had the way, and used it not,
To keep you from them.—Ah, I curse myself !
—My own, my Love !—those gentle words of yours,
Those promises—repeat them ; yes, once more :

You will be mine ; you *are* mine ; yes, my Love,
I do believe you now ; I may, I can—
(For *that* sings under the pillow ; believe Me !—)
I bless and kiss you for them all.

She sleeps.

*The Steel is singing to me now ; its voice
Creeps through and through ;—go on, she cannot
hear—*

*The things it sings are death and love ; ay, love
That death keeps true ;—She sleeps, she cannot hear.*

There is no sort of madness in my brain ;
But rather a great strength, a calm, as though
A more than human spirit dwelt with mine.
And yet I do perceive that, since last night,
My eyes have been bewildered with the glare
Of mighty blades and swords that seem to whirl
And strike around me, and transform the world
With an exceeding splendour cold and bare ;
A thousand films are as it were cut through ;
And all the beauty, supernatural

And real of things seems only to endure.
The Steel is an immense magician : yes—
Love, Beauty, Life—a touch can change them all
And make them wholly fit for me and great.
See now where *it* is gleaming through her hair !
'Tis like a fair barbaric ornament
Ablaze with glancing points of diamonds
Stuck in and out between the writhing black.
Or, rather, 'tis as fearful and as bright
As some fierce snake of azure lightning curled
Sinister under the dark mass of night,
That ever, with his sudden forkéd flash
Piercing some crevice, doth illumine it.

I could be gazing on this sight for hours.

O, Woman !—you are greatest in the world :
You have all fairest things ; all joy is yours
To give and take away ; you have all love ;
Your beauty is to man's heart as the sun
That doles out day and night to the whole earth ;
You have strange gifts of passion and sweet words :
In truth you are right splendid,—and well fit,

I think, to be the leman of a god ;
But all too fair, and yet not good enough,
To be the spouse and helpmate of one man.
—For this : there is a serpent in you hid ;
It dwells in the invisible of thought,
Or crouches in some corner of your heart,
Or is engendered in the ardent flame
Of your quick passions,—where, it matters not ;
But never doth it cease so to distil
Its wily poison into all you are
Or do or feel, it makes you turn and stab
Where most you thought to love,—it sets your lips
In league with falsehood to betray your heart,
Puts plotting in your heart against your lips.

You cannot will your heart to any man
But you must seek, for very wantonness—
As tempts the snake within you—just the straight
Betrayal of that man—his love, his faith,
As though you had not willed yourself at first :
And if you did not this somehow, your life
Would seem to you a nipped and withered thing,
Your beauty good for nought. You are made so.

—Therefore, my Love, I will not let you wake.
Nay—though you are so pure now and have sworn—
Lest you betray me as you did last time,
And times before that, having sworn as now.
But you are mine—my beautiful, my own !
And your lips said it while your heart beat here
Against mine—thrilling with a thought of me ;
Your looks were almost piteous with a prayer
That I—that God would save you. Shall your
 mouth,
The chaste, the holy one that I have kissed
Be desecrate once more ? Shall your own arms
Embrace and hug the very shame of you ?
Shall this, your heart that made you mine, be false
—Go once more seeking out adulteries ?

Not so : I strike the holy steel in it.

—It was the only way to keep her mine.



(1867.)

O WOMAN whose familiar face I hold
In my most sacred thought as in a shrine,
Who in my memories art become divine—
Dost thou remember now those years of old
When out of all thine own life thou didst mould
This life and breathe thy heart in this of mine,
Winning, for faith in that fair work of thine,
To rest and be in heaven?—Alas, behold!—
Another woman coming after thee
Hath had small pity,—with a wanton kiss
Hath quite consumed my heart and ruined this
The life that was thy work : O, Mother, see ;
Thou hast lived all in vain, done all amiss ;
Come down from heaven again, and die with me !

DEATH.

I CLOSE my eyes and see the inward things :
The strange averted spectre of my soul
Is sitting undivulged, angelic, whole,
Beside the dim internal flood that brings
Mysterious thought or dreams or murmurings,
From the immense Unknown : beneath him roll
The urging formless waves beyond control
And darkened by the vague foreshadowings
As heretofore ; yea, for He hath not stirred.
Too weak was that my life, too poor each word
To lure my soul from all it waiteth for :
—I am with God who holds His purpose still
And maketh and remaketh evermore ;
I am with God and waiting for His will.

THE FOUNTAIN OF TEARS.

IF you go over desert and mountain,
Far into the country of sorrow,
To-day and to-night and to-morrow,
And maybe for months and for years ;
You shall come, with a heart that is bursting
For trouble and toiling and thirsting,
You shall certainly come to the fountain
At length,—to the Fountain of Tears.

Very peaceful the place is, and solely
For piteous lamenting and sighing,
And those who come living or dying
Alike from their hopes and their fears ;

Full of cypress-like shadows the place is,
And statues that cover their faces :
But out of the gloom springs the holy
And beautiful Fountain of Tears.

And it flows and it flows with a motion
So gentle and lovely and listless,
And murmurs a tune so resistless
To him who hath suffered and hears—
You shall surely—without a word spoken,
Kneel down there and know your heart broken,
And yield to the long curb'd emotion
That day by the Fountain of Tears.

For it grows and it grows, as though leaping
Up higher the more one is thinking ;
And ever its tunes go on sinking
More poignantly into the ears :
Yea, so blesséd and good seems that fountain,
Reached after dry desert and mountain,
You shall fall down at length in your weeping
And bathe your sad face in the tears.

Then, alas ! while you lie there a season,
And sob between living and dying,
And give up the land you were trying
To find mid your hopes and your fears ;
—O the world shall come up and pass o'er you ;
Strong men shall not stay to care for you,
Nor wonder indeed for what reason
Your way should seem harder than theirs.

But perhaps, while you lie, never lifting
Your cheek from the wet leaves it presses,
Nor caring to raise your wet tresses'
And look how the cold world appears,—
O perhaps the mere silences round you—
All things in that place grief hath found you,
Yea, e'en to the clouds o'er you drifting,
May soothe you somewhat through your tears.

You may feel, when a falling leaf brushes
Your face, as though some one had kissed you ;
Or think at least some one who missed you
Hath sent you a thought,—if that cheers ;

Or a bird's little song, faint and broken,
May pass for a tender word spoken :
—Enough, while around you there rushes
That life-drowning torrent of tears.

And the tears shall flow faster and faster,
Brim over, and baffle resistance,
And roll down bleared roads to each distance
Of past desolation and years ;
Till they cover the place of each sorrow,
And leave you no Past and no morrow :
For what man is able to master
And stem the great Fountain of Tears ?

But the floods of the tears meet and gather ;
The sound of them all grows like thunder :
—O into what bosom, I wonder,
Is poured the whole sorrow of years ?
For Eternity only seems keeping
Account of the great human weeping :
May God then, the Maker and Father—
May He find a place for the tears !

LOVE AFTER DEATH.

THERE is an earthly glimmer in the Tomb :
And, healed in their own tears and with long
sleep,
My eyes uncloze and feel no need to weep ;
But, in the corner of the narrow room,
Behold Love's spirit standeth, with the bloom
That things made deathless by Death's self may
keep.
O what a change ! for now his looks are deep,
And a long patient smile he can assume :
While Memory, in some soft low monotone,
Is pouring like an oil into mine ear
The tale of a most short and hollow bliss,
That I once throbb'd indeed to call my own,
Holding it hardly between joy and fear,—
And how that broke, and how it came to this.

SOWN SEED.

I WANDERED dreaming through a mead ;
And it was sowing-season there ;
As one who sows and takes no heed
I cast my dreams upon the air :
And each dream was a golden seed
That in my life some flower should bear.

—O sowing-season bright and gay,
To have you back I am most fain !
O sowing season find some way
To bring me here each golden grain
I cast upon the air that day,
That I may sow them all again.

For some, that fairest should have been,
About the world they have been tost
And borne no flowers that I have seen ;
And some have taken wing and crost
The sea, or through the blue serene
Gone up to heaven and been lost.

O, sowing season, come once more,
Bring back each golden seed to me !
For one, indeed, grew up and bore
No flower of gladness, good to see—
A thing to look upon right sore
—A grief that in my life should be.

One other truly did beget
Some blossom of the June that fell
In May ; and one, a violet
Whose death upon my heart doth dwell ;
The last seed hath not blossomed yet :
Come back and bring this one as well.

—What ! the whole sudden summer ? Yea ;

The last one hath come up a rose !

O sowing season, you may stay ;

It is in my Love's heart it grows ;

And she hath shown it me to-day :

I keep this one and give up those.

A DISCORD.

I T came to pass upon a summer's day,
When from the flowers indeed my soul had
 caught
 Fresh bloom, and turned their richness into thought,
That—having made my footsteps free to stray—
They brought me wandering by some sudden way
 Back to the bloomless city, and athwart
 The doleful streets and many a closed-up court
That prisoned here and there a spent noon-ray.
O how most bitterly upon me broke
The sight of all the summerless lost folk !—
 For verily their music and their gladness
 Could only seem to me like so much sadness,
Beside the inward rhapsody of art
And flowers and *Chopin*-echoes at my heart.

GALANTERIE.

O ANGEL, that in some unmeasured region
 Keepest the store of beauteous things unsaid!
Once more do thou take even from their legion
 Verse of the sweetest, verse no man hath read;
And go with that—saying thou art from me—
Unto my Love wherever she may be;
 And speak therewith all tender things and fair
 Touching the beauty of her eyes and hair,
Her hands, her feet—all of Her thou may'st see,
 E'en to the jewels she shall chance to wear.

As to her eyes, I think thou shalt have reason
Setting the azure of them far above
God's blue of heaven ; yea, who shall know thy treason
But I who teach it thee and She my love ?
And therefore, fear thou nowise to express,
Touching her hair, how much its every tress
Doth shine above all gold that the sun yields
And the fair colour of the harvest fields :
But scarce shalt thou be slow to praise, I guess,
Soon as thou know'st what spell her beauty
wields.

And, if so be she cease that she is doing,
And give thee welcome for thy verses' sake,
Do thou with some most tender sort of wooing
Engage her hand, and cause it to forsake
Its silken task or pastime on the lute ;
For of its beauty thou shouldst not be mute,
But celebrate it soon in such a strain
Thenceforward it shall be no longer fain
To do its lightest toil : so for thy suit
My Lady's whole attendance thou shalt gain.

Then, howsoe'er thou dost behold that wonder,
The rare imperial foot of Her my queen ;
—Yea, if thou may'st but glimpse it nestled under
The broidered border of her robe, or e'en
If haply, some unguarded hour of rest,
Thou hast such bliss as I have never possest,
To see that spotless Lady all reclined
And through dim tumbled veils with thine eye
find

Her spirit-slender foot,—then do thy best,
And be thou neither faint of heart nor blind !

But so with every spell of piteous pleading,
And the full magic that was wont of old
To fill my verse and charm all men to heeding,
Frame thou thy praise of that thou dost behold—
That her most matchless foot shall even start
Out of its languishment and take my part,
To bring my Love not elsewhere than here,
To me, and to the place where she is dear :
Go now and do this, if thou still hast art ;
And I shall wait the while in love and fear.

THE GLORIOUS LADY.

“La gloriosa donna della mia mente.”

DANTE.

I.

I SEE You in the time that's fled,
 Long dead ;
I see you in the years to be
 After me ;
And for all solace I am given,
 Night or day,
To dream or think of you in heaven
 Far away.

I have the colour of your hair
 Everywhere ;
I have your beauty all by heart,
 Cannot part
From aught of you—I love you so—
 Though I try,
I know I shall not find you though
 Till I die.

When I have darkened all the day,
 Put away
The world and the world's sights and sweets
 —Mere deceits,
The blinding blaze of the false lights
 That arise
Between my spirit and the heights
 And the skies—

When I have turned from the pale face,
 Sickly grace,
Faint hair and hue of heart, thin smiles
 That cover wiles

Of looks that fail and lips that chill,
—All the drear
And pallid cheats of love that kill
The heart here—

Then do I dream—oh far away—
Another day ;
Another light where truer hues,
Reds and blues,
Live as in living eyes and cheeks ;
Where love lives,
And all my spirit loves and seeks
Love gives.

Nay, your true heart is not this pale
Thing to fail
Short of such promised love as dies
In such eyes :
I build up all the world anew,—
Nay, above,
I make another world—where You
Build up Love :

Behold your eyes are in the stead
 Of these dead,—
Pure seas of looks, with many a shore
 Of worlds more ;
Behold, instead of these poor moulds,
 These mere casts
In some first clay—no stuff that holds
 Love that lasts—

Why ! life—*that* love ; and then its fresh
 Robe of flesh,
With—O what chords of sense that thrill
 With love's will,
Unchecked by death or weariness,
 Those dull foes
Of every feeling, more or less,
 The world knows !

In place of all the glassy cheats—
 Your true sweets,
—Of all the lives with which Death plays,
 All the days

Left dim and void when Hope's own sun
Dare not shine—
In place of all and every one,
You divine !

I know the splendour that you were—
—You shall be ;
I see that nothing is so fair
As you there ;
I know that you—the thing I crave—
Men shall see
Again, when I am in the grave,
—After me.

O, whose shall be the barren years ?
Whose the tears ?
God, who of all this world of ours
Gathers flowers
—Taketh and maketh heaven, and faileth
Not at all,
Maketh a heaven that prevaieth
Out of all—

Shall God have care for this and this
—Flowers that miss
The love that gathers and that saves ?
For these graves,
Shall love to be, or love that's past,
Safe above,
Be less than perfected at last,
Less than Love ?

O, who shall have the barren years ?
Who the tears ?
You, World that gave me a false kiss,
Shall have this :
But I—I know that Love hath been,
And shall be
Again, when I am no more seen,
—After me.

II.

I SEE You with the face they paint
For some saint
Born and saved in some sublime
Olden time,
Crowned with the gorgeous golden-waved
Aureole ;
Just such a saint as should have saved
My own soul.

Yes ; for you have the human grace
In your face
Painted upon the panel there,
And what hair !

'Fra'—who was he? I forget—

Who could paint

Such a woman wholly, and yet

Such a saint?

From the dim cathedral height

Falls the light;

I could think it for a while

Christ's smile

From the great window-scene above

Strangely shed

Toward you, resting like Christ's love

On your head.

O the splendid purple niche

Deep and rich,

Stained of the colour of your soul

Strong and whole,

Full of the prevalence of prayers

And piteous plaint

You made for men and sins all theirs

—You a saint!

The niche a little narrow : well,
As the cell
Your world, your body—all things seen—
Must have been
About the soul that day by day
Groped and felt
To God's own house and found the way
As you knelt :

In an attitude of prayer
O how fair !
All the body crouched, constrained
As if pained
With the spirit's inward groan
To entreat
For a sin you could not own,
O how sweet !

Hands God making must have praised ;
Clasped and raised
Holy mediæval way
Used to pray ;

Sky all wrapped about your head
 Blue and sweet,
Earth all golden from the tread
 Of your feet.

God, who of all this world of ours
 Gathers flowers,
Gathered you in the old sublime
 Flower time :
If God had left some flowers like you—
 Who can tell?—
He might have had yet one or two
 Flowers that fell.

O then there were great sins of course ;
 Men were worse
Some ways no doubt ; at any rate
 Men were great :
We cannot bear their mail, much less
 Lose or win
Their heavens, through their great holiness
 Or great sin.

There were high things for men to see,

Do, or be ;

Fair struggles after every throne :

And to atone

Fair crowns and kingdoms for the best ;

All men strove,

And, loss or gain, for each man's rest

There was love.

And men and women bore their part

Heart to heart,

For oh ! the women and the men

Loved then ;

And love from love you could not break,

Half to save ;

If one sinned, for the other's sake

God forgave.

Would thou wert yet, thou great and old

Time of gold !

Wert thou with me, or could I flee

Back to thee,

God might have had one other flower
Nigh to fall,
And I known love at least one hour
—Once for all.

O who shall have the barren years ?
Who the tears ?
One with false bosom and cold kiss
May have this :
But somewhere, unless love forget
His old way,
There shall be something better yet
—Ay, some day.

LOST BLISSES.

THINK, O Heart, what sweet—had you waited
A moment, on such a day—

Had yet been to do or to say
That shall never be said now or done !

Think what beautiful worlds uncreated
The clouds then bore back to the sun ;
What blisses were all frustrated ;
What loves, that were almost begun !

Think, O Life,—had your stream but drifted
To this or that holier Past,
Or Future that must come at last—
Think, O sorrowful Life, and repent—

How the sorrowful days had been gifted
 With solace and ravishment,
And year after year slowly lifted
 To heavens of golden content !

THE SPECTRE OF THE PAST.

ON the great day of my life—
On the memorable day—
Just as the long inward strife
Of the echoes died away,
Just as on my couch I lay
Thinking thought away ;
Came a Man into my room,
Bringing with him gloom.

Midnight stood upon the clock,
And the street sound ceased to rise ;
Suddenly, and with no knock,
Came that Man before my eyes :
Yet he seemed not anywise
My heart to surprise,
And he sat down to abide
At my fireside.

But he stirred within my heart
Memories of the ancient days ;
And strange visions seemed to start
Vividly before my gaze,
Yea, from the most distant haze
Of forgotten ways :
And he looked on me the while
With a most strange smile.

But my heart seemed well to know
That his face the semblance had
Of my own face long ago
Ere the years had made it sad,

When my youthful looks were clad
In a smile half glad ;
To my heart he seemed in truth
All my vanished youth.

Then he named me by a name
Long since unfamiliar grown,
But remembered for the same
That my childhood's ears had known ;
And his voice was like my own
In a sadder tone
Coming from the happy years
Choked, alas, with tears.

And, as though he nothing knew
Of that day's fair triumphing,
Or the Present were not true,
Or not worth remembering,
All the Past he seemed to bring
As a piteous thing
Back upon my heart again,
Yea, with a great pain :

“Do you still remember the winding street
In the grey old village?” He seemed to say ;
“And the long school days that the sun made
sweet
And the thought of the flowers from far away?
And the faces of friends whom you used to meet
In that village day by day,
—Ay, the face of this one or of that?” he said,
And the names he named were names of the dead
Who all in the churchyard lay.

“Do you still remember your brother’s face,
And his soft light hair, and his eyes’ deep blue,
And the child’s pet name that in every place
Was once so familiar to him and to you?
And the innocent sports and the butterfly chase
That lasted the bright day through?”
—O this time, I thought of the churchyard and
sighed,
For I thought of the dead lying side by side,
And my brother who lay there too.

“ And do you remember the far green hills ;
Or the long straight path by the side of the
stream ;
Or the road that led to the farm and the mills,
And the fields where you oft used to wander or
dream
Or follow each change of your childish wills
Like the dance of some gay sunbeam ?”—
Then, alas, from right weeping I could not refrain,
For indeed all those things I remembered again,—
As of yesterday they did seem.

And I thought of a day in a far lost Spring,
When the sun with a kiss set the wild flowers free ;
When my heart felt the kiss and the shadowy wing
Of some beautiful spirit of things to be,
Who breathed in the song that the wild birds sing
Some deep tender meaning for me,—
Who undid a strange spell in the world as it were,
Who set wide sweet whispers abroad in the air,—
Made a presence I could not see.

O that whisper my heart seemed to understand !

O that spell it took hold on right willing feet !

To that beautiful spirit I gave my hand,

And he led me that day up the village street,

And out through the fields and the fragrant land,

And on through the pathways sweet ;

Yea, still on, with a semblance of some new bliss,

Through the world he has led me from that day to
this

With a tender and fair deceit.

“ O for what have you wandered so far—so long ?”

Said the voice that was e'en as my voice of old :

“ O for what have you done to the Past such wrong ?

Was there no fair dream on your own threshold ?

In your childhood's home was there no fresh song ?

—Was your heart then all so cold ?

Why, at length, are you weary and lone and sad,

But for casting away all the good that you had

With the peace that was yours of old ?

“ Have you wholly forgotten the words you said,
When you stood by a certain mound of earth,
When you vowed with your heart that that place
you made

The last burial place for your love and your mirth,
For the pure past blisses you therein laid

Were surely your whole life's worth?—

O, the angels who deck the lone graves with their
tears

Have cared for this, morning and evening, for years,
But of yours there has been long dearth :

“ In the pure pale sheen of a hallowed night,
When the graves are looking their holiest,

You may see it more glistening and more bright
And holier-looking than all the rest ;

You may see that the dews and the stars' strange
light

Are loving that grave the best ;

But, perhaps, if you went in the clear noon-day,
After so many years you might scarce find the way
Ere you tired indeed of the quest :

“For the path that leads to it is almost lost ;
And quite tall grass-flowers of sickly blue
Have grown up there and gathered for years, and
tost

Bitter germs all around them to grow up too ;
For indeed all these years not a man has crost
That pathway—not even You !”—
But alas ! for these words to my heart he sent,
For I knew it was Marguérite’s grave that he meant,
And I felt that the words were true.

Then the dim sweet faces of them of yore
Seemed to start from the mist where the memory
lies ;
And each one was as sweet and as dear as before ;
But a piteous look was in all their eyes—
Yea, the long smile of sadness ; and each one bore
A reproach in some tender wise :
Till my bosom was troubled and sorely thrilled
With the thought of them all, and my ears were filled
With a sound of the mingling of sighs.

And my heart, where the memories of them were
cast

And as buried and choked in the dust of the years,
Became peopled, it seemed, with the shapes of the
Past ;

And the voice of my brother grew fresh in my ears :
So my dried up eyes were softened at last
To weeping some few sweet tears ;
But the Man who was sitting at my fireside—
He covered his face with his hands and cried
As I did in those earlier years.

Then I faltered,—“ O Spectre of my lost Youth !

All too well at thy pleading the sad thoughts wake,
With the bitter regret of the Past, and in truth
The whole love of the fair things that all men
forsake ;

And for this thy reproach I am filléd with ruth—

My heart seemeth nigh to break :
Ah ! right gladly would I now return with thee
To those loves and those lovers, if that might be,
And be happy for their sweet sake.

“ And, O Spectre that wearest my look—my face,
And art ever with them as the thought they keep
To remind them of me in the changeless place
In the changeless Past where the memories sleep,—
Do thou tell them I am not all barren of grace,
Nor have buried their love so deep,
But that now after so long toward them I yearn,
And that often the thought of them all may return,
And that often it makes me weep.”

Then, alas ! I was troubled and filled with shame,
As I looked on His face and beheld him fair ;
For his locks were as gold, and his eyes as a flame ;
And I knew that one winter had blanched my
hair,
And that surely my looks were no longer the same
As in earlier days they were :
For I feared he should mock me and tell them of
this,
And that even my tears were but scant beside his.
O, this thought was a hard one to bear !

But at length I fell dreaming beneath the might
Of each spell of the Past whence I cared not to
start ;
And I saw Him some time by the flickering light,
As the one in my dream who was playing my part ;
Till his semblance grew dim and was gone from my
sight
As a dream of the Past will depart.
Then the Spirit whose beauty has led me till now,
Came and breathed a sweet breath on my feverish
brow,
And the strain of this verse in my heart.

A FADING FACE.

OUT of a dim and slowly fading place
In the deep dwelling mem'ries,—as it seems,
Mingled of purple mem'ries and of dreams—
The perfect marble features of Your face
Shine and are seen: each brow is like the space
Pearly in heaven after the sun-beams ;
And all the curving of the mouth still gleams
Where many a gracious smile hath left a grace ;
But the eyes are within, or all too far,
Or changed now to some element of heaven
Purer and subtler than the blue they were ;
They meet me not. I know not where you are ;
With God most—wholly in the grave,—or even
In the remembrance of you that is here.

THE HEART'S QUESTIONS.

Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 15, no. 3.

WHEN the heaven is blue,
Or the stars look down,
Or the golden crown
Glow upon the hills,—

When the sky of tears
Lets the sunlight through,
And the heart a moment thrills,
Yea, and utters too,—

Who discerns? who hears?
Who but I—and perhaps You?

When some thin thought-wave
From the shadow shore
Brings the Voice once more
From beyond the grave ;

When some pain is prest
Deep into the breast,
And the inward thoughts are swords
Killing one with sadness ;

Most when love is strong,
And the anguish long
Rolls up in a haste of words
Ending all in madness—

Who is he that soothes or cheers ?
Who believes ? who hears ?

Ay, when the Heart grieves,
Pants, prays—who believes ?—

Ay, when the Heart cries,
When it breaks, when it dies,—
(Ah, why was the Heart born !—)
Who shall save ? who shall mourn ?

BARCAROLLE.

THE stars are dimly seen among the shadows of
the bay,
And lights that win are seen in strife with lights
that die away :

The wave is very still—the rudder loosens in our
hand,

The zephyr will not fill our sail and waft us to the
land ;

O precious is the pause between the winds that
come and go,

And sweet the silence of the shores between the
ebb and flow.

No sound but sound of rest is on the bosom of the
deep,

Soft as the breathing of a breast serenely hushed
with sleep :

Lay by the oar ; there is a voice at heart to sing or
sigh—

O what shall be the choice of barcarolle or lullaby ?

Say shall we sing of day or night, fair land or
mighty ocean,

Of any rapturous delight or any dear emotion,

Of any joy that is on Earth, or hope that is above—

The holy country of our birth, or any song of love ?

Our heart in all our life is like the hand of one who
steers

A bark upon an ocean rife with dangers and with
fears ;

The joys, the hopes, like waves or wings, bear up
this life of ours—

Short as a song of all these things that make up all
its hours.

Spread sail! for it is Hope to-day that like a wind
new-risen
Doth waft us on a golden wing towards a new
horizon,
That is the sun before our sight, the beacon for us
burning,
That is the star in all our night of watching and of
yearning.

Love is this thing that we pursue to-day, to-night,
for ever,
We care not whither, know not who shall be at
length the giver :
For Love,—our life and all our years are cast upon
the waves ;
Our heart is as the hand that steers ;—but who is He
that saves ?

We ply with oars, we strive with every sail upon
our mast—
We never tire, never fail—and Love is seen at
last :

A low and purple mirage like a coast where day is
breaking—

Sink sail!—for such a dream as Love is lost before
the waking.

THE MINER.

BALLAD.

HO, I sing and I sing !
Digging jewels for the King ;—
Till I tire of the measure
I sing and I sing :
Here's a diamond true bright ;
Here's a ruby worth a treasure :
So I labour, and my sight
Surely fails, and I get gray
Digging jewels for the King :
I have toiled so many a day,
I have found so many a treasure,

Yet,—ah's me !—I dare to say
That I could not earn my way
To the palace of the King.

I was a miner—doomed
With a fate branded at birth
To serve the King entombed
In this dungeon of the Earth :
They gave me a thing called *Hope*,
A word written in gold
On a talent—precious I'm told ;
But, if I am to grope
All my life long in a mine,
What were the use at best
Of a bauble just to shine
And dangle at my breast ?

So I sing, so I sing
Here's a jewel for the King !—
Let me clear it of the rust ;
Wrap the gold thing in gold dust :

'Tis a perfect bauble—see,
A truly precious thing,
Far fitter for a king
Than a prisoner like me.

A WASTED LAND.

ALAS, for a sound is heard
Of a bitterly broken song ;
Grievous is every word ;
And the burden is weary and long
Like the waves between ebb and flow ;
And it comes when the winds are low,
Or whenever the night is nigh,
And the world hath space for a sigh.

It was in the time of fruit ;
When the peach began to pout,
 And the purple grape to shine,
And the leaves were a threadbare suit
 For the blushing blood of the vine,
And the spoilers were about
And the viper glode at the root :

—She came, and with her hand,
 With her mouth, yea, and her eyes
She hath ravaged all the land ;

 Its beauty shall no more rise :
She hath drawn the wine to her lip.
For a mere wanton sip :

 Lo, where the vine-branch lies ;
Lo, where the drained grapes drip.

Her feet left many a stain ;
 And her lips left many a sting ;
She will never come again,
 And the fruit of everything
Is a canker or a pain :

And a memory doth crouch
Like an asp,—yea, in each part
Where she hath left her touch,—
Lying in wait for the heart.

CHARMED MOMENTS.

Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 37, no. 1.

THE sky is a brilliant enamel ;
The sea is a beautiful gem ;
The hours are beautiful flowers
That pass, and we keep none of them ;
They bear not the thing we would cherish,
Those beautiful fruitless flowers ;
Each comes up to blossom and perish ;
We wait, and another is ours :

We wait till the heavens above us,
The flowering earth, or the seas
Shall bring us the soul meant to love us,
And hours much sweeter than these.

How thrill we, when heavenly hushes
Come over the sea and the land!—
Soft kissings of waves among rushes,
Footfalls of a bird on the sand,
Or least little stirs in the bushes
Take hold on the heart like a hand
Arresting—we know not for what—
But little we care to withstand :

How thrill we !—We think that some Spirit
Is speaking each moment like that ;—
O faint not, strained ear, till you hear it,—
Heart, break not till you understand !

A LIFE-TOMB.

O THE house is haunted and rife
With Her touch behind panel and door
And her footfalls under the floor ;
O the house is filled with gloom :
—Is She here dead in my life ?
Am I here alive in her tomb ?—

Ah fain am I still to track
And to walk along the ways
Sown with flowers by her feet ;
And to gather, following back,
All the purple nights and days
She slew passing ; or, half sweet,

To sit with dull eyes cast
On slowly dying embers
Of things the heart remembers
Right fair in the heart's past,
—Till tones, that seem to start
From the shadows in the room,
Move round about the heart,
And a love-glow fills the gloom ;
And her soul seems to look out
As from dim and distant eyes,
And a shade of lips to pout
With some remnant of her sighs.

And often too, in the night,
The flame in famished eyes
Re-kindles an old delight
At some dream-sight of her ;
The heart with tremulous stir
Lives a moment and then dies.

THE SLAVE OF APOLLO.

“**H**OW shall I rid myself from thee,
 Apollo? Give me leave to be
No more than flower, or wind, or thought,
—Only a fragrant memory, nought,
Or anything that’s free :

“Give me—O pitying—some power
To cease ; make me a gentle shower ;
 A hidden fount that murmureth
In some sweet glimmer all apart
 From sounds of living : give me death !
Or loose me for your love of me ;
My bosom faileth and my heart
No more a prisoner will be
—Will be free !

Shall I not cry to ye aloud
O clouds ! My spirit was a cloud
 Like one of you,—was free, I say,
To loiter o'er the tremulous lakes
Loving, to cling upon the wane
Of every fair thing that forsakes
 The light and luxury of day ;
To bear me over hill and plain
 Upon the winds' unfooted way :

Ah, I was fearless then and pure ;
And my sight touched all things obscure
 Beneath dim masks of change or sleep :
And read the tender meanings writ
 For full new heavens down in deep
Horizons, over which stood knit
The storms' dark brows ; I saw what cleaves
 In the far corners of sun-smiles,
 And I could send my breath for miles
Among the flowers and the leaves.

O bosom of my mother Heaven,
Was not I purer than the dew?
Was not my spirit of the leaven
Of your own high eternal blue
Unspotted by one part of earth?
O, wherefore this dull flesh that wraps
My sense in shame,—O, why this birth
Among hard human sights and mirth!
Hear now, and draw me back to you.
Call to me through the silent gaps
In some great tempest cloud above,
Steal me when, gasping in the laps
Of these that sicken me of love,
I lie and think of my lost bliss:
O can you not in one long kiss
Absorb my spirit back to you?

But thou, Apollo, who prevailest!
Hast thou made me thine envy? choosing,
Out of all creatures, me the frailest;
Me the most piteous, for the loosing

Of thy swift amorous looks like hounds
That hunt my soul—heavy and rife
With bodiless delights and sounds,
And knowledge of a goodlier life ?

—O, not until some fate shall darken
This soul with death, shall any scorn
Or hate of heaven make me mute :
Rather, through hot days, will I hearken
For quick breaths panting in pursuit,
And the swift feet of some sweet fawn
Crashing among the fallen fruit :
And him—making my whole blood blush—
I will all languishing beseech,—
Crush me, O God, as thou wouldst crush
Some fire-fed fruit, some fallen peach,
Some swollen skin of purple wine ;
Care not to spare me,—nor refuse me ;
Take me, to use me or abuse me,
And slay me taking me for thine !—

So—till he seize me with a shout,
Tear me, and sear me with his breath ;
Yea, till he tread my heart quite out,
And give me Death !

And if not Death !—

O all the night I shall be free
To steep me and to stifle me
In dew, and cool dew-dropping hair,
In every shadowy haunt and lair
Where most forgetfulness may be ;
And, all on flame, my soul shall flare
Into the chillest of the dark,
And there be quenched, spark by spark,
To the last faintest spark of me.

I will be wasted as a spoil
On all things of the woods and winds ;
Earned with no eagerness or toil
I will be for the first who finds—

A revel for mad zephyr lips,
A soft eternity of sips :
I will no sweet of mine detain ;
 But wholly be to them a prey,
 Used lavishly or cast away
For the whole rout of them to drain.
Or I will give myself to make
Sport for the green gods of the lake ;
 —All fierce are they with foamy breath,
 And rainbow eyes, and watery souls,
Quaint things, half deity, half snake ;
 —O, I shall lay me in the shoals
 Of waves : or any way get Death !—

So I shall rid myself from thee,
Apollo !—So at length be free !

THE POET'S GRAVE.

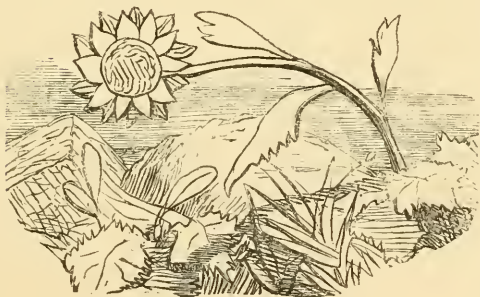
IN a lonely spot that was filled with leaves,
And the wild waste plants without scent or
name,
Where never a mourner came,—
That was far from the ground where the false world
grieves,

And far from the shade of the church's eaves—
They buried the Poet with thoughts of shame,
And not as one who *believes*.

Then the tall grass flower with lolling head,
Who is king of all flowers that twine or creep
On graves where few come to weep,
To the briar, and bindweed, and vetch, he said,
“Lo, here is a grave of the lonely dead ;
Let us go up and haste while his soul may sleep,
To make the fresh earth our bed.”

Then the rootless briar and bindweed mean,
And the grovelling vetch, with the pale trefoil
That cumpers the fruitless soil,
Yea, the whole strange rout of the earth's unclean
Went up to the grave that was fresh and green ;
And together they wrought there so dense a coil
The grave was no longer seen.

But the tall mad flower whose head is crowned
With the long lax petals that fall and flap
Like the ears of a fool's bell-cap,
He stood higher than all on the fameless mound ;
And nodded his head to each passing sound,
Darting this way and that, as in sport to trap
Each laugh of the winds around.



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